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BABY BULLET



BY
LLOYD OSBOURNE



R. L. Stevenson collaborator
San Francisco October 14 - 1905 -
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J.

Louise Graham
Clack Graham
and
"Brownie" Graham

From

Louise Potter
Frank Potter
and
"Snuffles" Potter

So you've been married
three years longer - we've
got as many dogs as

BABY BULLET
THE BUBBLE OF DESTINY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE QUEEN VERSUS BILLY

LOVE, THE FIDDLER THE MOTORMANIACS

In Collaboration with Robert Louis Stevenson

THE WRONG BOX

THE EBB-TIDE THE WRECKER



“But I wanted you to know that I, too, had suffered.”

BABY BULLET

THE BUBBLE OF DESTINY

BY

LLOYD OSBOURNE



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CHAPTER I

OVERHEAD shone the fierce sun of a British July; underneath ran the king's highway, broad, dusty, and unending; on either hand were the solid walls, richly crowned with broken glass, that encompassed the aristocracy of Britain in the cool and lordly privacy of their parks. Two pilgrims, weary, hot, and thirsty, were trudging in the direction of the town of Porchester, where two dress-suit cases and a bath awaited them alluringly at the "Royal Elm."

They were both women. The elder, Miss Christine Schell, was about thirty-five, a homely, determined-looking schoolma'am, who was doing ninety days in Europe with the ferocity of one whose best years lay entombed behind her in a little mountain valley of California. Her companion, Miss Essy Lockhart, was about nineteen, a tall, handsome blonde, with

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the fearless eyes, the confident carriage, and the charming boyishness that have been the immortal birthright of the Western girl.

No people could have been more dissimilar than these two. In age, social position, and general outlook on the universe they were poles apart. Miss Schell's sturdy independence had been gained in a sad and altogether embittering battle with the world. The world, or rather those blind and pitiless forces we call by such a name, had singled out Miss Schell for some of its cruellest buffets; and foiled by her undaunted front had at length grudgingly allowed her sixty dollars a month and the control of a mountain schoolhouse. There it forgot her, and turned its baleful attention elsewhere.

This trip to Europe was the fruit of microscopic savings, added to dollar by dollar, and helped out by savings-bank interest compounded semi-annually. It stood for shoes she had not worn, handkerchiefs she had never bought, holidays she had never taken. Now at last this sacred hoard, which seemed at times to her almost like a capitalization of her own youth, had been drawn upon for the realization of that wonderful dream—her trip to Europe.

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When she compared herself to Essy Lockhart she was almost angered at the contrast. To begin with, Essy was extraordinarily pretty; then she was the daughter of very well-to-do people in San Francisco, who were only restrained by good taste from calling themselves rich; she was petted and loved and spoiled, and had only to reach out her hand for anything she wanted. In this case she had wanted to go to Europe with Miss Schell, and though her mother cried, and her father looked grave, they gave way, like a well-trained American family, to the caprice of an only daughter.

And so here they were, the two of them, in unassuming gray and sailor hats, calmly walking through the length of England on a tour. They each bore a little bag, slung by a leather strap from the shoulder, in which they carried the barest necessities of civilized existence. Thanks to the Parcels' Post, two bulky dress-suit cases were kept dancing ahead of them, and even a precarious connection with a laundry in Lancashire was similarly maintained by the use of maps and time-tables. Miss Schell gave these details a Napoleonic attention, which, on the principle of genius taking infinite pains, was correspondingly rewarded.

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"What did you say the next place was?" asked Essy wearily.

"Porchester," returned Miss Schell.

"Oh, Christine, let's hope there's nothing to see there," Essy went on. She was growing more and more to welcome those friendly oases where there were no "sights."

"Only Bramstone Castle, dear," said Christine reassuringly. "Built 1343, you know; figured in the Wars of the Roses; repaired by Oliver Cromwell; the book has a star against the great main hall, so we simply have to see it. Then there's Oxenford Parish Church, where the Elizabethan poet Tymmmons is buried—and some Roman remains that needn't bother us very much—and— Oh, yes—there's a famous something—I've forgotten what it is now—that it would be absolutely wicked of us to skip!"

Essy, with a sigh of submission, walked on in silence. She was comforted by the thought of a bath and clean clothes; and, besides, the air was pleasant to breathe, the tops of trees showed sweetly from within the aristocratic strongholds, and after all it was something to be nineteen and alive.

They had not gone far when a double toot

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warned them of an approaching automobile, and they sprang hastily to one side to let it pass. It flashed by them in a pother of dust, and sped up the long hill in front, exhaling a voluminous odor of hot engine, fried lubricating oil, and burned gases.

Essy sat down mournfully at the side of the road. She forgot about being nineteen and alive. Life had suddenly become a dreary blank.

"What's the matter?" demanded Miss Schell, who had no sympathy for weakness, moral or physical.

"It's that," said Essy dejectedly, pointing after the car, which had now diminished to the size of a green bug.

"It's terrible how they've got to own the roads," exclaimed Miss Schell. "They think a toot is all the consideration we're entitled to, and burst out laughing when they see us run! Nowadays, it's like walking on a railroad track to go anywhere."

"Oh, but Christine, think how jolly it would be to whiz into Porchester like those people who just went past—with our things strapped on behind, instead of going all wrong in the Parcels' Post! It's awful to waste these beau-

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tiful roads by just walking on them—and if another passes I'll lie down and cry!"

Miss Schell turned a brilliant stream of Ruskin on this incipient conflagration. She dwelt on the vulgarity of swift locomotion; the harm it did the human soul to engross itself in levers while Nature flew by on either hand, unregarded. The only way to soak in scenes of beauty and historic interest (according to Miss Schell) was to *walk* through them—not to whizzle and bang through them on an explosive toy that might go off any moment like a bombshell.

Essy was hardly convinced; but the spasms excited by the automobile were passing, and she permitted Miss Schell to gently switch the conversation back to the sixteenth century. What Miss Schell didn't know about the sixteenth century wasn't worth knowing, and she had a faculty of referring to the main personages as though she had seen them yesterday. She termed it "visualizing history," and knew everybody by their first names.

Essy's perfunctory attention was at length excited, and the dusty miles melted beneath their feet as Miss Schell tightened her grip on that fateful period by such "visualiza-



It flashed by them in a pothor of dust.

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tions" as: "It might have been right here where Arundel's messenger, cloaked and spurred, waited at midnight with the letter in his hand"; or, "perhaps that is the very turret, where, bound and bleeding, he was left to die!" Essy was thrilled by so vivid a contact with the past, and Miss Schell, as the personal eye-witness of history, soon absorbed her whole attention. The sixteenth century suddenly leaped into the twentieth, however, when far before them on the road her quick eyes caught sight of another car.

"Look!" she cried excitedly to her companion. "Something's the matter with it, for it isn't moving!"

"There's always something the matter with them," ejaculated Miss Schell. "Nasty, diseased things, *I* call them!"

"Hurry up," exclaimed Essy, quickening her pace.

"The queen was in tears," resumed Miss Schell, "but her intrepid character, never so bright or self-reliant as in the throes of adversity, asserted itself even in that dark hour. The Earl of Murray——"

"Oh, skip it, Christine," cried Essy. "Let's run!"

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"But don't you want to hear about the casket letters that were found in the castle after Bothwell's escape?"

Essy made no reply. She was all eyes now for the stuck car. It was the strangest one she had ever seen, a high-up, substantial, chunky wagon of the early type that suggested a lopped-off carriage without horses, with enormous mud-guards, and a silly little bob-seat in front with a railing round it. It was of a brilliant red color, as was the young man that seemed to go with it—an immensely tall, sandy young man, who had cranked himself to the last verge of exhaustion. He was fanning himself with a book of directions, and a lick of grease over his left eye gave him a wild and forbidding appearance. He was not only excessively tired, but he seemed excessively angry as well, and he glared at Christine and Essy as though their presence was an intolerable intrusion. He seized a monkey-wrench and dived under the car, while Christine and Essy seated themselves on the grass, and listened comfortably to a hoarse and subdued profanity that trickled upward into the ambient air.

To Miss Schell it seemed an indelicacy to

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assist at the sandy young man's humiliation and despair. She nudged Essy's arm, and indicated that they ought to proceed. But Essy refused to budge. Indeed, she betrayed symptoms of wishing to join the young man beneath the car, and was only withheld by the absence both of room and invitation. He was certainly in a furious temper, and would evidently have turned on an angel from Heaven had one dropped from the clouds expressly to help him. He even hammered in a damn-you-take-that sort of way; and his protruding legs (all that could be seen of him) were articulate of frenzied indignation.

Finally he uncurled himself, and burrowed his way out. He was plastered with dirt, which here and there streams of sweat were turning into mud. He was more savage than ever, and cast a murderous look at his two spectators. Had they uttered a word he would have exploded like a volcano; but such is the inconsistency of man that their silence tempted him to speak.

"The devil made this car!" he exclaimed.

There was something so threatening and defiant in his mode of address that Essy's question died upon her lips. The first person who

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spoke to the young man would probably be held responsible for the disaster. He was just longing for a justification to hit somebody.

"The devil!" he repeated, as though hoping against hope he might yet be contradicted. His hay-colored hair stuck up in front like the crest of some extraordinary fowl—a fowl that was looking for trouble.

"I wouldn't mind if it couldn't go at all," he burst out. "I could get used to *that*! But a car that invariably drops you twenty miles from home—a car that makes a fellow the joke of the county—a car that—!" He paused in his tirade as though he really couldn't do justice to the subject. Perhaps it came over him for the first time that he was addressing two strange ladies. He grew redder than ever under his mask of grease and dirt, and for a moment embarrassment overpowered exasperation.

"Might I ask how long you have had it?" inquired Christine.

"A fortnight," he replied, taking fire again at the memory. "A terrible, livid, ghastly fortnight! A fortnight of horror and mortification! Upon my word, there hasn't been a single day I haven't walked twenty miles—and

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that, if you please, with the tools, lamps, and rugs—and once it was forty! The fellow that owns such a thing ought to go into training—he ought to be a professional *walker*—and a rich walker, too, in order to pay the bills—and he ought to have a skin like a rhinoceros besides, to stand off the chaff!”

“You must take it straight back to the agent,” said Miss Schell decisively. “If it won’t work, make him trade it for another!”

“Agent!” roared the young man. “Why, I won the infernal thing at a charity bazaar! The ticket stood me half a guinea, and the vicar’s little daughter drew me the winning number out of a silk hat!”

“But there must be a name-plate on it somewhere,” said Christine, prompted by Essy.

“There it is,” responded the young man, landing a kick on the hub of the nearest wheel. “Despardoux et Cie, Paris. Of course I wrote to them, but they answered it was an obsolete type, and sent me a white and gold catalogue of their new cars!”

“How unfeeling,” said Essy, who was trying not to laugh.

“It’s cost me twenty pounds already,” resumed the unfortunate young man, “not to

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“speak of the ten and six for the original ticket, nor what I’m out for towage; and the doctor says if I do much more cranking I’m sure to drop dead!”

As he spoke he took a pair of pliers and tore off the number that hung suspended in the front of the car. Then he went to the rear axle and detached the number there. This done, he crammed them inside his coat with the crafty air of a burglar putting away diamonds. It was a mysterious performance. Miss Schell couldn’t forbear asking him what he was doing it for.

“Because if I don’t, some officious tomfool will be sure to tow it home after me,” he explained, with a gleam in his pale eyes. “They’ve played that trick on me every day for the last week. No, I’m done with the infernal thing forever and ever. Here I leave it for the next unfortunate, and may God help him!”

A shiver passed through Miss Schell’s frame. She had that sudden choking sense that she was uttering words that might have astounding consequences.

“Do you mean to say you are deserting it?” she quavered.

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"Yes," said the tall young man, burdening himself with four alligator wrenches, a jack, two screw-drivers, a tire-repair outfit, and a rug, "and you two ladies would do me a particular favor by giving no clue by which I might be recognized and followed!"

"Christine?"

"Essy——!"

"I know how to run a car. I've run papa's Manton for a year. Quick, before he——"

"Oh, Essy——"

"Go ahead——!"

"But all by yourself?"

"Done it often——taken off tires, too!"

"Oh, but I daren't!"

"Then I will!"

"No, no, let me!"

"Then hurry, hurry, Christine!"

Miss Schell cleared her throat. The stranger stood there, gloomy and impatient, waiting for her to speak. The schoolma'am's lips were trembling, and the words could hardly form themselves.

"M-m-may I have it?" she gasped.

The young man gazed down at her with a smile of scorn and pity; and then, as though

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he could scarcely credit his own good fortune, started to run across the road.

"But you haven't told me if it's really mine?" Miss Schell's voice was almost a wail.

He clambered over the fence, and then turned long enough to utter the single word: "Yes!" With this he fled, taking long kangaroo leaps in the direction of a wooded knoll.

Essy gave Miss Schell an ecstatic hug.

"Think of our having an automobile of our own!" she cried.

"*Our* own!" ejaculated Miss Schell pointedly. "I'll ask you to remember that he gave it to *me*, and that it is *my* car!"

Essy hugged her again, bubbling over with laughter.

"You told me you hated them," she cried. "Only a minute ago I distinctly heard you say that the——!"

"I guess I've got converted," said Miss Schell, recovering from the panic of a possibly divided ownership. And then, forgetting everything but the joy of possession, she rose and climbed into the seat. Essy followed, and laid her hand lovingly on the steering lever.

Who can say from whence the inspiration came? Or how, from the close-printed corner

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of the sporting-page, that name had leaped up and remained securedly embedded in her sub-consciousness? At first she could only remember it had something to do with a gun.

"A gun, Essy," she murmured. "Something to do with a gun, and suggestive of minuteness and velocity. Small and swift as a—a—yes—as a bullet." Then suddenly it sprang to Miss Schell's lips rounded and complete.

"I am going to call it Baby Bullet," she cried.

CHAPTER II

THEY sat side by side for ten minutes, gloating and dreaming. The seat was big, wide, and luxurious. Miss Schell said that even the merest tyro could see it was a very expensive car, with nothing cheap John about it. It was such a comfort to think it was French—all the finest cars were French, weren't they? And its being a bit old-fashioned didn't hurt any. Old-fashioned things were often lots better than new-fangled ones. Didn't it feel solid under you? Didn't it feel strong and splendid, as though it could go anywhere? That young man was a fool, of course—nice of him to give it to her—but plainly a saphead, and without the least mechanical ability. Essy would supply that! Wasn't it providential that she—Essy—knew all about them!

“Wouldn't it be dreadful if he changed his mind and came back?” said Essy.

This remark threw Miss Schell into a fever of apprehension. The bright pictures faded from her mind. It was nightmarish to think

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of losing Baby Bullet. She asked Essy eagerly how long it would take her "to set it going?"

"Heaven only knows," returned that young lady. "Indeed, I wouldn't try to do anything here at all. Let's take the first tow to the first machine-shop!"

"That's Porchester." Miss Schell's voice was that of a ghost.

"Well, why not?" asked Essy, surprised.

"Why, don't you see, dear," said Miss Schell, "we've got to put just the biggest distance we can between that young man and ourselves. Porchester is only four miles off. No, Essy, I sha'n't be able to breathe till we're a hundred miles away, and it's my idea we had better tow all night!"

"I don't go two cents on that young man," agreed Essy.

"I suppose I ought to have got it in writing, but he seemed in such a hurry. He's capable of turning right around, and taking it away from us again," said Miss Schell.

"Us," repeated Essy maliciously. It still rankled with her that Christine had annexed Baby Bullet so absolutely. It hurt her sense of comradeship.

But Miss Schell was too wrought up to notice

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such verbal pin-pricks. She was possessed of a vision of the young man returning, with kangaroo leaps, to oust her from Baby Bullet. She felt that her life's happiness was hanging by a thread. Essy descended, and took a preliminary survey of the car. It evidently dated back to the period when manufacturers were innocent enough to suppose that a gas-engine would run indefinitely without either supervision or adjustments. You compactly assembled your motor and transmission, and then hid it beneath a substantial cab. You built it over as though you were thoroughly ashamed of the whole performance—as well you might be. The history of automobilism may be condensed in the phrase, “live and learn,” and neither had been carried very far at the time of Baby's birth. It would have taxed a professional contortionist to reach a spark-plug, and the whole body and engine were so inextricably mixed that there was hardly room for your hand to explore the dreadful mystery. Essy's contempt for the young man began to lessen rapidly. Baby Bullet was going to prove a pretty hard nut for the best minds in the business—or teeth, I suppose she ought to have said; and when, by dint of poking and prying, she stumbled on the

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fact that of the three cylinders two were twins, exhausting into a third of larger bore, her first bold assurance received something of a shock. It was an extraordinary hybrid engine of a weird compound nature; and she was in the act of tracing one of the high tension wires with her hand to a point where it unaccountably vanished into the woodwork, when she was roused by a cry from Miss Schell.

She extricated herself to find her friend striking a bargain with a carter. He had appeared on the scene while her investigation had been in progress, walking at the head of two powerful horses and a heavy dray. He was a slow-witted, beery individual, with inordinate ideas on the subject of towing automobiles. His destination was Little Diston, a village some six or seven miles beyond Porchester, and he was demanding a king's ransom for his services. Miss Schell, firm but conciliatory, was dangling half a crown before this burly fish, who refused to swallow anything under a "payound."

"Strike me dead if it ain't worth it, mum," he said, bending a herculean shoulder to Baby Bullet, and pushing it an inch to show the stupendous nature of the undertaking.

"Three shillings!" said Miss Schell, who

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was standing on the seat, and sweeping the horizon with an eagle eye. "And if that won't satisfy you, I'll wait for the hay-wagon!"

Sure enough, another competitor in the tow-business had lumbered into view.

"And six," said the carter insinuatingly.

"And six," assented Miss Schell, who in her eagerness to get away was dancing on the car as though it were red hot. "And say, man, do you know anybody at Little Diston who can tow us out from there to-night?"

"Where to, mum?" asked the carter, leading up his horses, and then backing the dray into Baby Bullet's nose. "Where to, mum?"

"Anywhere," said Miss Schell comprehensively.

"There's 'Awkins's caab, mum."

"'Awkins's what?"

"Caaab, mum."

"What does he mean?" Miss Schell entreated of Essy, who was puzzling out the brakes.

"Caaaab," roared the carter. "Don't you know what a caaaaaaab is?"

"Cab, dear," said Essy, who had a quicker ear for rustic English. She was directing the hitching now, and overcoming the carter's de-

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sire to make fast to the radiator. When they were about ready to start she remembered that it might be wise to open the pet-cocks. She got out, flattened herself under the wagon, groveled in the dirt and darkness, and at length emerged, a greasy and disheveled specter of what one minute before had been a very pretty woman. Miss Schell regarded her dreamily, and quite oblivious to any change in her appearance, remarked: "You must teach me all those little things, Essy!"

In a few moments they were under way, Essy steering, and with her foot ready on the transmission brake to check Baby Bullet's impetuosity when slight changes in the grade made such a precaution necessary. Miss Schell leaned back in a seventh heaven of delight, and with a sigh of deep content, resigned herself to the joys of automobilism! Little it mattered to her that the pace was four miles an hour, and that they were tied to the tail of two tons of furniture. It was automobiling just the same, and the elation of it transcended words. She was riding in her own car—her *own!*

"Oh, it's grand—grand—" she murmured, closing her eyes in bliss. Her faded face shone

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as though with renewed youth. Her thin, angular figure relaxed in the roomy seat, and the broad cushion at the back was as caressing to her as the arm of a lover. Life had withheld from Miss Schell the dearest things in its power to give—husband or child, beauty, friends, money or position—but here was Baby Bullet to offset them all!

“Just wait till we scoot along at thirty miles an hour under our own power,” said Essy. She was excited too, and indulgent of Miss Schell’s almost childish enthusiasm. “I’ll be surprised if the engine doesn’t develop fifteen h.-p. on the brake, or even more!”

“Fifteen h.-p. on the brake,” ejaculated Miss Schell, repeating the words like a poem.

The afternoon wore on. They reached Porchester, and halted at the “Royal Elm” for their dress-suit cases. All Porchester assisted to tie them on behind Baby Bullet; all Porchester craned its head to see Miss Schell give the hostler sixpence; a large portion of Porchester followed them for a mile into the country, and offered up a farewell cheer.

Miss Schell was rather appalled at exciting so much attention, but Essy said she’d soon get used to it.

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"After a while you never give them a thought, you know. The same person who yells 'Get a horse' when you've broken down on the main street, will hold things, and help push, and all that as friendly as anything. Automobiling makes you realize that there's a lot of good in human nature!"

Miss Schell was relieved to hear it. The crowd had upset her, and she was worried besides—haunted almost—with the fear that the tall young man might pop out of somewhere, and demand back his car. The thought of such a thing made her blood run cold.

They were about half way to Little Diston when they approached a cross-roads. This offshoot of the main highway was merely a rough country lane, and they would scarcely have given it more than a passing glance had not a break in the hedgerows disclosed a brother in misfortune. Yes, at the tail of a plow-horse, ridden by a barelegged boy, was another automobile water-logged like themselves on the broad ocean of England. It was a monster compared to Baby Bullet, with a long hood that told it was a four-cylinder, and a top with rolled-up side-curtains. It had the very long chassis and the fine lines of a crack French

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car; and Essy's practised eyes approvingly took in the side-entrance, the water-gage on the dash, and a few other points of up-to-date excellence. These technicalities considered, the solitary occupant next claimed her attention.

He was a very big young man, with a bulldoggish face, and stalwart shoulders; and he was steering negligently with one gauntleted hand that half covered the wheel. Even at a distance there was a curious grimness in his expression as though he had taken his disaster very much to heart. His bold profile and powerful jaw lent him a masterful air, which was intensified by an indefinable sternness as he gazed before him at the horse. Following the strange car, at about a dozen paces in the rear, was another man. He wore a short leather coat of a dirty wine-color, with breeches and puttees to match; and in one hand he held his cap, while with the other he carried a natty, cloth-covered, young-ladyish valise that seemed to burden him excessively. There was something in his appearance unmistakably foreign—foreign and dejected—and a crushed spirit obviously lurked under all that plum-colored leather. His overcast face was thin and sallow; his untamed

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black hair covered his head like a mop; and he had a quick, nervous, French way of walking, which under happier circumstances would have readily become a little dance of courtesy and deference. It was a mystery that he should thus be tramping on two legs, and even be weighed down, besides, by a heavy valise, when there was so much room to spare in the car that preceded him, and to which his *mécanicien* clothes showed that he rightfully belonged. The bulldoggish young man and he had evidently fallen out.

The driver of the new car took a side-long glance at Baby Bullet; and then, leaning over the dash, gave an order to the barelegged boy. The horse broke into a trot, and Mr. Four-Cylinder forged ahead, as though afraid, when their roads converged, that he might be condemned to the second place. But such was not his intention, however, for at the cross-roads he came to a stop; and Essy, adroitly swerving Baby to the side in order to gain an uninterrupted view, was electrified to see the bulldoggish young man descend, take several paces in her direction, and then, hat in hand, deliberately wait for Baby Bullet to approach!

CHAPTER III

Miss SCHELL was all of a quiver. Her thin, wiry figure straightened. She gave agitated little pats at her grayish curls. A Man—an unintroduced Man—was lying in wait to address her; and she tingled with a feeling that her automobile was bearing her toward a singular and unconventional situation.

Baby Bullet trundled on slowly till it was almost abreast of the stranger. The carter stopped. The stranger advanced a step, and in a deep, pleasant voice said: "I beg your pardon!"

Miss Schell uttered a ladylike and encouraging cough. It said: "Please go on; I approve of you; what is your trouble, my poor young man?"

The stranger, with a wave of his large hand, indicated the plum-colored foreigner, who had also halted, and who was looking on from a respectful distance.

"That unmitigated chump," began the stranger, in a tone carefully calculated to cover

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the respectful distance, "that seven-hundred-and-fifty-francs-a-month French fraud — that tangle-haired galoot and all-fired idiot and tom-fool, forgot to fill my petrol tank this morning, and stranded me here in the middle of an agricultural country!"

This was all Greek to Miss Schell, but she murmured: "Oh, dear; oh, dear," in a tone so commiserating that it reached straight to the bulldoggish young man's heart.

"If your own tank is full," he went on, "might I so far trespass on your good nature, and appeal to the bond that unites all good automobilists—to beg a single gallon to carry me on to the next supply?"

"Have we any?" Miss Schell asked of Essy.

"I suppose so," said Essy, remembering that petrol was English for gasoline.

"Don't you *know*?" inquired the young man, stunned for a moment at this appearance of subterfuge. "'Pon my soul, I'd be grateful for a quart!"

"I imagine we have plenty," said Essy.

"Would you permit me to look?" pleaded the stranger.

"Yes, if you know where," said Essy.

The young man stared at her in amazement.

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He wondered if her words could be meant as a joke. But his need was too urgent for him to waste time; and construing her words as a permission, he forthwith dived under Baby Bullet. There they heard him bumping his head and smothering oaths. The Frenchman approached, set his valise down, and gloomily regarded them. Suddenly his face wreathed in smiles.

"Why, dis is an old three-cylinder compound Despardoux!" he exclaimed, patting Baby affectionately, and evidently recognizing an old friend. "I didn't know zat there was one left in ze whole world! To think," he went on, smilingly meeting Essy's eyes, "to think zat there still runs a Despardoux!"

"I don't know about running!" said Essy, emphasizing the last word.

"Zat was always the trouble with ze old Despardoux, mademoiselle. It was the glory of exhibitions, but on the road—*peste!* Should I be taking a freedom if I observed that doubtless mademoiselle has already had a great deal of trouble?"

"Very little so far, monsieur!"

"You see, we haven't had it very long," Miss Schell conscientiously volunteered.

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"A good car, though," the Frenchman went on, fearful that he might have given offense. "Vairy what-you-call solid. You could throw the Despardoux over a precipice, and it would arrive at the bottom none ze vorse!"

"Could you not assist the gentleman with you?" said Miss Schell, who was conscious that beneath her feet a fellow-being was in acute distress, and that a human head was getting badly bumped.

The Frenchman's countenance changed, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I am deescharged!" he said. "I received my deesmissal an hour ago. I have neither the inclination nor ze good-will to assist Mr. Sutphen!"

Even as he spoke, Mr. Sutphen (as the strange gentleman seemed to be called) kicked himself out, and rose to the surface. He was half-angry, half-puzzled. Didn't they want to oblige him with the petrol that they so sedulously kept the secret of its whereabouts?

"You see my predicament," he said in a wounded tone. "I cannot think you'd grudge a brother automobilist so small a favor—so small for you, I mean, and yet all-important to me! Where is your tank?"

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"The trouble is, I don't know," said Essy.

Mr. Sutphen looked more puzzled and hurt than ever.

"What's the matter with your car?" he asked.

"I don't know that either!"

"Where are you going?"

"You can search me!"

This homely idiom, thrown out as a feeler, was completely successful in its object.

"Americans!" he exclaimed delightedly. "I'm an American myself!" Essy found herself shaking an immense gauntlet. Miss Schell shook the immense gauntlet. The only outsider in this happy reunion was the Frenchman, who glowered at his late master, and muttered "Sacred Blue" under his breath. Essy, in a gush of confidence, and sustained by the unspoken concurrence of Miss Schell, hastily explained how they had come into the possession of Baby Bullet.

"There must be a gasoline tank somewhere," said Mr. Sutphen, gazing at the chunky little car. "And if the man said he had only come twenty miles, there ought to be a lot!"

"You can have all there is if you can find it," said Essy.

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Then the Frenchman took a hand.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "as a favor to *yourself*, but in no way for Mr. Sutphen, who has heaped insults on me the most frightful, I shall be happy to show you the exact posection of the tank!"

"Yes, that's a good fellow," said Sutphen.

The Frenchman pointedly ignored this observation.

"If ze two ladies will kindly descend," he said, "I will put my humble services at their deesposal."

Mr. Sutphen helped them out, while the Frenchman, using the screw-driver end of his pliers, began to take out the floor boards. He uncovered the tank, and gave it a few taps to determine how much it held. It was full.

"Ask Mr. Sutphen to bring his air-pump, and the collapsible bucket he will find in the right-hand basket next the cold chicken," said the Frenchman to Essy, as though she was to interpret this into an unknown tongue. "Let us not use our own pump, as petrol is harmful to ze washers, and vairy bad for rubber."

Mr. Sutphen went off for both these articles. He was too pleased to get his gasoline to mind the other's guarded insolence. There is noth-

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ing so intolerable to an automobilist as to be stuck for lack of fuel. The dishonor of being towed becomes doubly intensified. Sutphen lovingly extracted two bucketsful of that appalling fluid from Baby Bullet, and with sniffs of satisfaction, bore it carefully to his own car. When he had turned over his engine, and caught the spark, he could almost have hugged himself with joy.

"Now please tell me what I can do in return?" he demanded of Miss Schell. His strong, sunburned face was glowing with gratitude. He was ready to give away half his kingdom.

The schoolmistress, with the cunning of the serpent, and the demureness of the dove, made some ladylike pretenses of refusal. They could get along very nicely by themselves, she declared, and couldn't possibly dream of taxing his good nature. The carter would tow them to Little Diston, where they would exchange him for a cab, and embark on an all-night trip.

"All-night trip!" exclaimed Sutphen, eying her with amazement.

Essy hastily, and at a cost of some embarrassment to Miss Schell, explained the need to

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put all the space possible between themselves and the unknown donor of Baby Bullet. Mr. Sutphen began to laugh—a contagious laugh, in which both Essy and Miss Schell had to join. There was something very warm, friendly, and comrade-like about him—together with a sort of American directness and good-fellowship—and Miss Schell, far from being offended, basked deliciously in his radiating kindness. Essy thought she had never seen more beautiful teeth in a man, and determined that he wasn't nearly so ugly as he had first appeared; or, at least, it suited him to have a big nose, and a big mouth, and a general rockiness of feature that accorded with his broad shoulders and athletic figure. She approved of Mr. Sutphen, and labeled him “nice.”

He had out a pocket-map, and was running an immense forefinger past Little Diston.

“I'll tell you what we'll do,” he said. “Here's Axminster, about thirty-five or forty miles north of here, and there aren't any contour lines that mean grades. I can get you there easy by about half past eight; and then there'll still be time for you to engage the hay-motor, and go on all night if you choose.”

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"Tow us?" queried Miss Schell, who could hardly believe her own good fortune.

"Bet your life," returned Sutphen in the vernacular of God's own.

Essy clapped her hands. There was no doubt about his being nice. A pair of soft, girlish brown eyes beamed sweetly on the four-cylinder hero of the occasion. He—the four-cylinder hero—backed up his splendid car, and paid out twenty feet of inch-manila.

"Now see here," he said confidentially to Essy, "this tow business is easy enough behind a wagon, but do you think you have the nerve and skill for a fifteen-mile clip?"

"I've run a Manton for a year," she returned, a little hurt at his skepticism. "And I hold the Park certificate, and I won the ladies' non-stop to San José!"

He gazed at her admiringly. Here was something like a girl. She spoke the gasoline language, and was, besides, astonishingly pretty. A girl like that would appreciate an external expanding, metal-to-metal clutch, and a carbureter with positively connected valves. Henrietta didn't know one end of a car from the other. He sighed from a variety of complicated emotions, and hitched up. It came over

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him that he liked Miss Schell too. The world was a pretty good place after all, and there were lots of good people in it. It was a hell of a car, though, that little Despardoux!

"We'd better have a simple code of signals," he said. "Three toots of my horn will mean that I am going to slow up suddenly. One from you will tell me to speed up; two, to keep it at that; three, to slow down, till I hear two—or if you keep on three-ing, I'll stop altogether."

They rehearsed these several times so that there could be no misunderstanding, and tested Baby Bullet's horn to see whether the reed were properly adjusted. It was a splendid little tooter, with a roar like a bull. Miss Schell, who was a little distance off, talking with the Frenchman, was warned by the sound to climb in.

The Frenchman, disconsolate and wobegone, was watching these preparations like a child against a candy-store window. The natty valise drooped in his hand. He saw himself marooned in the heart of Albion, in a suit of plum-colored leather, and far, far from home. Thunder of God, was it fair, was it right, was it honorable? The scalding tears choked his

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answer, which, naturally, was in the negative. But Heaven, that tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and takes count even of the lowly *mécanicien*, had found for him a friend. Miss Schell, who had ingeniously thought out a way of killing two birds with one stone, was insisting that he should be given the little front seat on Baby Bullet. Compassion, blended with self-interest, were both at work in that snowy bosom. The secrets of the Despardoux—now Baby Bullet—were to be economically unlocked by M. Alphonse Taliefferro Bocher, at some convenient machine-shop to be sought out on the morrow. He had already vociferously volunteered his services to that end, and had drawn a lurid picture of Baby's probable fate at the hands of the British workman. Thousand thunders, would she allow those boobies to touch that beautiful (if somewhat old-fashioned and complicated) car, and ruin it forever with their bungling hands! He did not dwell on the expense. Doubtless, expense was but a trifle to mademoiselle, but no one wishes to pay out a fortune and receive back a tangle of steel that was once a Despardoux! But he—Alphonse Taliefferro Bocher, free of charge—mademoiselle would remark his words—free

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of charge—would engage to put that little Despardoux, etc., etc.!

Mr. Sutphen received the proposal a shade unkindly. His smoldering anger flamed up all over again. What? Tow that imbecile, that putty-headed fool, that dreamy-eyed ass, who had stuck him in the middle of a wheat-field nine miles from anywhere, and thus condemned him to the charity of Baby Bullet! He Had Positively Asked Him That Morning, "Alphonse, Are You Sure The Tank Is Full?" And Alphonse Had Positively Answered, "Yes, Sir, It Is Full!"

"But he's sorry," said Miss Schell.

"Of course, he's sorry!" roared Mr. Sutphen.

"And ashamed."

"He ought to be ashamed!"

"But listen, Mr. Sutphen, he has promised to stay with us to-night, and it would feel such a protection——"

"Protection!" began Sutphen. "A Man Who Would Leave His Gasoline Tank Empty——!"

"Please," interjected Essy. "You needn't have anything to do with him, you know. You needn't even *look* at him if you don't want to."

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A little while ago you said you were so grateful——”

“I am grateful,” said Mr. Sutphen, in a dark and threatening manner.

“You surely wouldn’t go so far as to dictate who’s to ride—or not ride—in our own car?” Essy’s eyes were beginning to flash.

“Yes, that’s all right!” Mr. Sutphen brushed the remark from him as though it were a fly. “But A Man Who Would Leave His——!”

“Please untie the rope,” said Essy, whose cheeks were turning pink with indignation. “If you will not let us run our own car in our own way, we’ll simply have to call off the tow!”

Mr. Sutphen reeled under the blow. It came over him that he was making a most offensive appearance before this charming fellow-countrywoman. He apologized humbly, and conceded everything.

“Please forgive me. Yes, yes, you are quite right. Take him, by all means, if you want him!”

It was now Alphonse’s turn to be hurt.

“No, leave me here,” he said, with an irritating abnegation. “No matter that night

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approaches, and I know not the way. Rather than be an infliction, and ze cause of disagreement, I willingly resign myself to remain." He sat down on a mile-stone, and folded his arms.

Miss Schell rested a despairing hand on the mud-guard of Baby Bullet. Essy gazed reproachfully at Mr. Sutphen. Sutphen rammed his hands in his pockets, and murmured under his breath that a Man Who Would Forget To Fill——! Alphonse moodily lit a cigarette, and waited for the situation to resolve itself. Over all floated a rich perfume of gasoline gas.

Here let the novelist draw a veil of stars.

* * * * *

Mr. Sutphen returned from his little talk, leading Alphonse by the arm. They had patched up an armed neutrality. Explanations had been made and accepted. The tank episode, though far from forgotten, was to be ignored. They had come together on the common ground that these innocent ladies must not be allowed to suffer. A few bites of humble-pie had accomplished wonders. No one is easier to lead than a Frenchman, nor harder to drive, and magnanimity is a national trait. Alphonse skipped up on the front seat of Baby

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Bullet, smilingly took his valise on his lap, and directed mesdemoiselles' attention to the superb sunset. Mesdemoiselles, cozily lapped in one of Sutphen's fur-lined rugs, watched the latter settling accounts with the carter and the bare-legged boy. He came back to give them a last tuck-in, exchanged a friendly glance with Essy, and then, climbing into his car, threw in the low-gear clutch. The rope tightened; Baby Bullet jerked into line; Sutphen meshed his intermediate speed—and they were off!

Toot! toot!

CHAPTER IV

IF Miss Schell enjoyed her first tow, imagine her sensations at the second! Sutphen's powerful car sprang ahead with the untamed strength of a locomotive. Its sixty horse-power took no more thought of Baby than if the latter had been a tin can. The little wagon tore behind with a whizzle and a bang that completely outdid its lordly and silent brother, whose only note was the thrilling hum of its four coils. Walls and fields flew past them on either hand. Little Diston spun by like a picture on the cinematograph. Blinded with the wind and dust, suffocated by the burned-out gases of the exhaust, pale and speechless with fear—Miss Schell clung to her seat in a paralyzing ecstasy of joy. The human clay shook with apprehension, but the soul soared and sang.

Essy, clinging to the tiller with both hands, and with her foot resting on the transmission brake, stared unblinkingly in front of her, and concentrated every faculty in keeping Baby Bullet on an even keel. In the mad, headlong rush she was powerless to reach the tooter, for

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the tiller shook and struggled in her grasp, and a single unlucky stone in the road or the tiniest patch of gravel would have instantly whipped it free. Like a practised driver she measured with her eyes the distance to the emergency brake lever, drilling herself in imagination to grab for it if need be. In front of her, hunching himself to obscure the view as little as possible, poor Alphonse cowered in his leather, with the valise clasped tightly in his arms.

Occasionally Sutphen slowed down for an unruly horse, or to pass through one of the many hamlets; and once he stopped altogether and got out, to see if all was well with the tow.

"You are doing splendidly," he said, looking up at Essy's flushed and eager face. "So well, in fact, that I couldn't help pressing the pace!"

"It's a perfectly wonderful car!" exclaimed Miss Schell, who had lost her hat, her veil, her neckerchief, and most of her hairpins, but whose zest and enthusiasm were still undiminished. "A perfectly wonderful car!"

"It has more power than it knows what to do with," said Sutphen, fondly regarding what he thought was the object of her approval.

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"Oh, I meant Baby Bullet," she said. "Didn't it hang on well! Didn't it run with all its little legs! My, but how proud it made me feel that it was mine!"

Essy and Mr. Sutphen could not forbear smiling at this outburst of devotion. To them Baby's rôle had not seemed so distinguished. Essy said, woundingly, that any dog would run if you tied it to a train. It was Alphonse who came to the rescue and sided with Miss Schell. He liked this tall, thin mademoiselle with the steel-blue eyes—and, liking her, he was not so ungallant as not to include her car.

"Ze old Despardoux has its points," he said. "It will yet surprise you all. It is not one of those little geemcracks that sprinkle the roadway with its component parts. You could throw it over a precipice——"

"That's the second time you've thrown it over a precipice!" interrupted Essy.

"It's a suspicious indorsement of a car," added Sutphen. "It really sounds as though they had tried it!"

Miss Schell writhed under these jokes at Baby's expense, and her heart warmed toward the Frenchman, for whom she felt a sudden gush of friendship. She discovered that he was

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quite good-looking, and more innately a gentleman than his ex-master. Her good opinion was strengthened by his whispered remark that those laugh best who laugh last, and that on the morrow he was going to make her proud of owning a Despardoux.

Sutphen proposed, in his own words, that they should "shift a bit." Shifting a bit meant that he should take Essy up beside him in the big car, while Alphonse steered Baby from the place she vacated. Essy hardly knew about the propriety of this arrangement, and tacitly left the decision to Miss Schell. That lady, formerly a staunch upholder of the social fabric, was so completely demoralized that she assented without a murmur. The change was accordingly made, and the tow began again.

Essy snuggled into the seat on Sutphen's left. She was tense and nervous with the strain of guiding Baby Bullet in the wake of the big car, and it was a luxury to lean back and feel no longer the least responsibility. Her only concern was a lurking fear of the young man beside her. It would be too bad if his friendliness should become overfriendly. Heaven only knew what he thought of her and Miss Schell—and men, anyway, were so stupid. It

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would hardly be his fault if he did misjudge them. Here they were, two strange women, not exactly stealing an automobile, but certainly laying themselves open to—! At any rate their fever to widen the distance from Baby's late proprietor accorded badly with the standards of an iron rectitude.

In the intervals of these thoughts she gave little sidelong peeps at her companion, who, apparently conscious of her constraint, absorbed himself in the business of running his car. She noticed several things that had before escaped her. In the first place, Sutphen was older than she had originally judged—thirty, or thirty-two or three—the effect of youth being due to a boyish manner, and the fact that he followed the prevailing fashion of being close-shaven. Her woman's intuition conjectured him to be unmarried. He had the air that goes with power and money, and the lines that betrayed the hard struggle to obtain them. He belonged to the modern American type of self-made man—the college-bred type—the good-manners-and-plenty-of-brains type. Altogether this Mr. Sutphen was a very creditable representative of the biggest and greatest of republics.

His ardor for speed had somehow diminished.

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He was now quite content to poke along at eight or ten miles an hour. He was enjoying the little adventure, and had the kindest feelings for this charming girl beside him. She really was awfully pretty, and the whole situation was whimsical and delightful.

He broke the ice by explaining the positive lubrication of his car, and was more than pleased to find a kindred soul who shared his detestation of the splash-feed system. They grew quite chummy in consigning it to the bottomless pit, together with the air-cooled heresy, and the man who invented a semipneumatic tire they both had tried. No doubt the day will arrive when the automobile, as a subject, will be talked out, and even its most hardened votary silenced forever. But that day has yet to be, and for the present at least, to the genuine motormaniac, it supplies him with the material for incessant and excited conversation. There is no friendship so secure as one founded on a common hobby; and in this, where every one connected with it has something to learn and something to teach, the bonds of comradeship are those of steel. The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church, and all human associations have thriven best under persecution.

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The automobilist has all the world against him, from the old lady in the pony-phæton to the little boy with the brick; from kings on their thrones to the motor-man on Eighth Avenue. He is, in one word, the Outcast of Society, with every man's hand against him!

Small wonder that within the devoted ranks of the Gasoline Brotherhood there exists a feeling only comparable to the primitive church. The Panhard lion lies down with the runabout lamb; the sixty-horse Mercedes scorns not the flimsy teakettle affected by the rash and economical; the lordly Renault willingly lends its jack or its auto-clé to its lowly brother-bug. Like the proscribed aristocrats of the revolution, rank is forgotten in the common danger and the common need!

Essy had intended to maintain a certain distance—to imply, by a becoming reserve, that she belonged to the caste which does not readily ride in strange automobiles with strange men. But her good resolutions faltered, and were finally forgotten, as they passed from their first cordial agreement on the splash-feed system into a swift intimacy of spark-plugs, magnetos, commutators, direct-drives, and sliding gears. Mr. Sutphen was extraordinarily interesting.

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His past embraced seven cars. He had raced in Florida, and knew Barney Oldfield. He knew Fournier. He knew everybody and everything!

He, on his side, was no less transported. His girls had all been electrics, with here and there a steam. Never before had he met one who was at home on a big gasoline car. At first he had been a trifle incredulous. Fluency does not always cover knowledge. But if you have ever ground a valve, or adjusted an ignition-cam, or toyed with the interior of a carbureter, or dropped castor-oil in the leather bands of your friction clutches—you need not fear being tripped up by the craftiest of broad-shouldered Americans. Essy did not know it all, of course. Who does? But she had been on the road, and knew its lessons and its difficulties, its triumphs and its tribulations.

From this high school of automobilism, let us turn back to its kindergarten—the Despardoux; and to that three-hour-old fanatic, Miss Christine Schell. The engaging Frenchman, with the patience of a Job, and all the grace and vivacity of his incomparable country, was training a virgin mind into the first principles of the four-cycle internal-combustion engine.

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Smarting with his dismissal, hurt in the tenderest place—his pride—bitterly conscious of the disgrace that in some ways he had to admit was deserved, Alphonse Taliefferro Bocher was slowly regaining his self-esteem under the approving gaze of his newly discovered friend.

There are some men who never outgrow a certain timidity. Bocher was as brave as a lion, and, given the ditch, would have died in it heroically, sword in hand. But to be alone appalled him. He was a creature of social instincts, in whom the community-sense was peremptory. It was as natural for him to have a master as it was to a dog. Money was the least of his needs, and he was content so long as he had a cigarette, and a place, however humble, in the life of another. But in conjunction with an automobile, *c'est entendu!* He, too, was a motormaniac, and petrol was the very breath of his nostrils!

In his exuberant gratitude he was loading down Miss Schell with favors to come. His heart was in it, he declared, to make the Despardoux—Baby Bullet—a little car that would be her delight and pride. Baby should go—and go well—and prove to these beefy English that even an extinct French type was superior to all

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their Wellingtons and Wolseleys! His services should not cost mademoiselle a penny. A little tobacco, a plate in the kitchen, a kind word—and *voilà!* He would find his reward in mademoiselle's regard, and perhaps, as Baby fleetly covered the length of Britain, exciting everywhere the admiration of all beholders—perhaps mademoiselle would occasionally recollect with good-will the lineaments of her *devoué* Alphonse Taliefferro Bocher!

Miss Schell informed him warmly that she should do so. The lineaments, beside, were not unpleasing. In that empty gallery of her heart she might well place the image of this amiable Frenchman. It came over her that she had misjudged his nation. Perhaps she had been unduly swayed by her disapprobation of Louis XIV. One must remember that Lafayette had been a Frenchman; Pasteur also; so had the Comte de Grasse, who had given such loyal support to Washington at Yorktown. It was decidedly broadening to travel! Alphonse T. Bocher was very nice; in appearance he was even distinguished; he was going to prove himself invaluable about Baby Bullet. Altogether, she felt justified in letting down the bars, and extending the right hand of fellowship.

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All about them the tranquil English landscape glowed in the rays of the setting sun. The windows of thatched-roofed cottages, picturesquely bulgy and timbered, shone as with eyes of fire. Astonished wayfarers, some of them in smock-frocks as though they had stepped straight out of a novel of Thomas Hardy's, stopped and stared open-mouthed at the coupled cars. Rustic lovers were unexpectedly overtaken in the act of kissing. Shabby clergymen, country doctors on cobs, high-class babies in prams—at intervals helped to raise the social average of the highway. With one and all there was an open and unashamed enjoyment in Baby Bullet's humiliation. To see that bold and tooting terror laid low rejoiced the Simple Lifer on two legs, and brightened his humble lot. The fall of the mighty is ever dear to the inconspicuous person on the street.

"I am afraid we are getting to Axminster," said Sutphen, as the straggling houses grew closer, and street-lamps, red pillar post-boxes, and sidewalks began to appear. His tone of regret was unaffected. He was sincerely sorry that the little adventure approached its end. With very slight encouragement he would have

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volunteered further favors, but without knowing exactly why, he felt instinctively that they would be out of place. His assistance might readily be accepted once, but its continuance was impossible. So Essy gave him to understand in that unspoken language in which women excel.

They drew up before the "Green Dragon," and all descended. Sutphen would have kept them to dinner, for it was now seven, and his own appetite was ravenous; but his companions smilingly refused. While Alphonse scurried off to make arrangements for a tow—servitude setting on him as naturally as fetching and carrying with a dog—the rest of the party crossed the street to a little dairy where Miss Schell purchased four forlorn buns and a bottle of milk. The cab was to be thus humbly provisioned for the all-night journey ahead. Sutphen was depressed at the inadequacy of these preparations, but only got snubbed for his pains when he tried to add a sausage-roll and some ginger-beer. The threads were snapping that had momentarily bound him to this beautiful and captivating girl. He envied Alphonse from the bottom of his heart. For the lack of those empty social forms—introductions and so on—he foresaw himself obliged to let his tall,

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slim beauty go, without even her name being known to him, or the least clue by which he might again seek her out. At the time it struck him in the light of a tragedy.

They crossed the street again. A battered landau, with two horses, was busily ousting the four-cylinder. It hurt Sutphen to see that his own rope was not being used, but that a fresh piece, obviously newly bought, had taken its place for the tow. Bystanders surged all about them, making conversation difficult. He found himself shaking hands through the open window of the landau, and making the most inane farewells. It seemed so stupid to merely wish them good luck and no punctures. His overflowing heart desired to say so much more. Miss Schell thanked him for his kindness in good, set terms. Essy said less, but there was a trace of sadness in her brown eyes. He was awfully nice—and hadn't been a bit forward or troublesome! Under the circumstances it seemed quite permissible for the poor fellow to squeeze her hand and hold it for a few seconds longer than the conventions allow. She even gave him the ghost of a squeeze back, and felt, oh, so sorry for him.

It was a tender moment for them both. It

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might have been spun out a little longer had it not been for Alphonse, who tooted loudly and vindictively from Baby Bullet for his late master to stand back. The Frenchman still cherished dark and resentful feelings, and the hoarse tooter gave them voice. The landau-driver clicked to his horses; Sutphen sadly unbared his head; and amid a buzz from a hundred excited throats, Baby Bullet started on its second journey into the unknown!

CHAPTER V

A LANDAU is a poor place to spend a night in. One's original sense of discomfort increases stupendously as the laggard hours merge and multiply. Tempers suffer as well as legs. Harmless remarks develop unsuspected stings. Essy and Miss Schell got into the carriage somewhat tired and disheveled, but otherwise amiable enough. But by midnight they could only properly be described as tigers. The trudging pace, Baby Bullet's creaky shuffle, the cramping confinement—all conspired to put their nerves on edge. Essy derided any thought of pursuit, and warmly declared that Miss Schell was running away from a shadow. It would only be a lunatic who wanted to get Baby Bullet back. Why had they not stayed at that comfortable inn, and slept like respectable people between sheets? To Miss Schell any reflection on Baby was a sacrilege. It was maddening to hear the little car slammed, and that in language so technical that she was at a loss for any reply.

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She got even by saying that Essy had flirted with Mr. Sutphen, and had placed herself in an ambiguous position by accepting a seat in his car. Essy retorted it was Miss Schell's own arrangement, and besides, she hadn't flirted—and if she had it was surely in better taste than to choose a crazy, football-haired Frenchman! Miss Schell demanded Heaven to bear witness to the innocence of her tête-à-tête with Alphonse. Essy said that might be all right, but she had to admit—Miss Schell had—that he had a cast in his eye, and a wicked look. Miss Schell heatedly denied both accusations, sneering at Mr. Sutphen's personal appearance, and the way he had roared at poor Alphonse "as he might to a dog!"

"He is a dog," said Essy, goaded beyond endurance. "Anybody's a dog who forgets to fill his gasoline tank. Mr. Sutphen was perfectly right to roar at him. Under the circumstances I should have roared myself!"

The writer hesitates any longer to allow the reader to peer into those dark depths of female nature. He decorously closes the landau-door, and reminds him that none of us are perfect. It had been a hard and exciting day. Grease had flowed freely. Emotions of many kinds

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had rioted at the expense of nerves. Outraged Nature was balancing her books, and usuriously repaying herself with splinters of human souls. Besides, too, that greatest of peacemakers, slumber, was stealthily obtruding a flag of truce. This would be a nice place for the writer to say something bland and patronizing about sleep. But the subject has already been done so much justice to—by other and more competent hands—that he conscientiously forbears. Let it go as said!

Toward six o'clock they rolled into Stud-dingford, having completed the run of twenty-seven miles. Our two heroines sleepily sat up, smiled wanly at each other, and then gazed blankly out of the window. Leadership had never seemed so forbidding to Miss Schell as at that moment. Oh, for a kindly hand to lead and guide! Lo, there it was on the sash, a hairy French hand, ready to do both—and more. The devoted Alphonse, rising supremely to the occasion, was taking everything upon his own shoulders. He chose an inn; he waked it up; he registered his two charges under the unassuming appellation of Brown; he engaged a double-bedded room; he called for hot water in an imperious voice; he fell on his knees and

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undid two pairs of buttoned boots. Oh, leather-clad son of France, thou of the football hair and wolfish face, angels watched thee with approval, and seraphim rejoiced! Miss Schell submitted to Alphonse with the meekness of a kitten. It's all very well to be self-reliant and assertive—but not at six in the morning! At that unhallowed hour there is something to be said for a man to lean on. Leaning on male creatures (metaphorically, of course) was a new sensation to Miss Schell, and a wonderfully agreeable one. She saw how insidious and undermining it might become in the case of a woman with less strength of character than herself. What nice manners he had . . . how generously he had always spoken of Baby Bullet . . . the social position of chauffeurs was undoubtedly anomalous . . . would it be a disgrace to a woman of refinement, a daughter of a late major in the regular army . . . to . . . to . . . ?

The weary head sank snugly against the pillow. The weary eyes closed.

On the outside of the door, pinned to a panel, was a smudgy notice that held a succession of chambermaids at bay.

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"The Miss Browns are not to be disturbed on no account."

Toward three o'clock the two ladies began to return to life. At three-fifteen, Miss Schell groped for her watch and exclaimed: "Oh, Essy, just think what time it is!" At three-thirty, Essy said: "Christine, you are going to sleep all over again!" At three-thirty-five, Miss Schell wondered whether there was such a thing as a bath-room in the hotel. At three-forty, Essy said that there probably wasn't! At three-forty-two, Miss Schell remarked that the only detestable part of automobiling was the dirt of it. At three-forty-seven, Essy said: "You very soon get used to it!" At three-fifty, Miss Schell wanted to know what would they have done without that dear Alphonse? At three-fifty-four, Essy said she couldn't think, and began to search for her stockings. At four there was a knock at the door, and a chambermaid, through two inches of British oak, informed them that the shaffour sent word that the motor-car was ready for them down-stairs!

They rushed to the window, and saw—yes, positively—Baby Bullet guzzle-guzzling under its own power, and terrorizing the whole courtyard with its frantic evolutions! It floundered

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and gasped and spluttered like some huge clumsy fish endeavoring to escape capture, backing into ash-barrels, savagely rushing up to walls as though to hammer right through them, skinning past excited hostlers, and generally comporting itself in the blustering, bullying, high-handed manner of a car that wishes to give all the trouble it can. Alphonse, serene and masterful at the tiller, was putting Baby through its paces, occasionally getting out to feel for a hot bearing, or to give a twist to the air mixture, or to test the radiator tubes with his hand! He was enjoying to the full the sensation he was making, and was not above inventing imaginary troubles in order to hold the stage, and enhance the splendid spectacle.

Miss Schell gazed at Baby with rapture. It was moving! Essy, it was actually moving, with its ownny-tonty little engine!

"It's about time," said Essy, who was equally delighted, and even more surprised; but who, as a practical automobilist, felt it necessary to show a certain calm. "All bubbles are supposed to, you know!"

"But that horrid Mr. Sutphen——"

"He wasn't a bit horrid. How can you say such a thing?"

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"But whenever he looked at Baby Bullet he always smiled so contemptuously!"

"How do you know it wasn't pity?"

Pity!

Of all stinging words to apply in regard to that gasoline darling, choo-chooing below to the admiration of all beholders, and prancing and cavorting with the robustness that comes of a rich fat spark, exactly timed! In her elation and pride Miss Schell put the subject by with a toss of her head. What did it matter, anyway, the inspiration of Mr. Sutphen's smile? The past was behind; and the present—the intoxicating present was calling for her with a double toot!

Alphonse received them below with enthusiasm. Were ze ladies satisfied with Baby's magnificent performance? Was it not a fine little car, after all, in spite of its seven years! Let them get out on the road, and he would show them what a Despardoux would do! The Frenchman's eyes were hollow from want of sleep. He was tired to exhaustion. He had been continuously struggling with Baby Bullet for eight consecutive hours, and this after a night when he had not once closed his eyes. Give the expert a machine-shop, and a car that

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won't go, and he will work till he drops. It is the law of his being. That's what made him an expert in the first place. That's what will cut him off in his manly prime. That's what ruins you if you pay him by the hour. Who will say that fanaticism is dead, or that a man will no longer die for an idea!

"And what do ze ladies propose now?"

Miss Schell proposed tea, and invited Alphonse to join them on the upper porch of the hotel. The hero was petted and made much of. He was encouraged to talk. He was encouraged to make away with vast quantities of sandwich and jam. He did both simultaneously. Such a happy Frenchman! Such a happy Miss Schell! Such a gay and mischievous Essy Lockhart! The world lay before them, and their little land-ship below was waiting to bear them whichever way they would! And this land-sailor, with the thin face and ravenous appetite, plotted wonderful cruises on the table-cloth, and made it out such a favor to himself that he be allowed to remain in an unpaid capacity! *Parbleu*, a man must have a holiday, and this was his! Sacred Blue, there would be many to envy him his association with

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two charming ladies, whose condescension was only matched by their——!

Essy interrupted to ask what he had found wrong with Baby Bullet.

"Oh, nosing to speak of," he said. "The cylinder-heads were badly packed, and bits of packing would become incandescent and cause premature explosions. Then ze commutator didn't break quick enough, and had, besides, a tendency to gradually advance ze spark. And the wiring was all wrong, and one of ze batteries had a dead cell, and the rest only showed four-five with the ammeter. Zen there was a troublesome back pressure in ze muffler, with heat and explosions. Graphite had hardened in some of ze oil-tubes, causing faulty lubrication and overheating. And ze carbureter was vairy gummy, the needle-valve faulty, the pump bearings badly worn, valves needed re-grinding, one of ze radiator tubes had to be replaced—and zen, of course, zere was ze transmission!"

"Well, what about the transmission?" demanded Essy.

Alphonse bolted an entire sandwich, and then regarded her solemnly.

"Some day, when I have plenty of time,"

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he said, "I will tell mademoiselle all about that transmission! Do we not lay a kindly handkerchief on ze face of ze corpse? Well, let us treat Baby's transmission with an equal respect!"

Miss Schell looked intensely depressed. The innuendo crushed her to the ground. This reference to mysterious inward troubles in Baby Bullet was terrifying. Alphonse noticed her wobegone expression and flew to relieve it.

"Oh, but a fine car," he protested. "A magnificent car, with a superb margin of structural safety. There are many cars of to-day for which I would not dream of exchanging ze little Despardoux!"

Miss Schell brightened up. She had always felt a similar conviction of Baby's worth, but it pleased her to hear it authoritatively indorsed by an expert. She forgot about the transmission. Confidence was restored. The sun again shone. The thrill of adventure once more resumed its sway.

Behold them a little later skimming merrily along, Essy steering, Alphonse dozing on his precarious front seat, Miss Schell, with her hands crossed primly in her lap, the very picture of content. They had made a common sacri-

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fice of their two dress-suit cases; and Alphonse, not to be outdone either, had included his own natty valise. Baby Bullet's baskets now held all their belongings, greatly to the relief of their knees and feet. To Miss Schell this seemed a most delightful arrangement, involving, as it did, an utter dependence on Baby that she felt would never be unjustified. It seemed to show that they trusted Baby, and was altogether cozy, comfortable, and homelike!

The first ride in one's own car belongs to the order of Great Sensations. Doubtless there is a certain pleasurable excitement in being informed that you have just been elected president of the United States, or to learn from your broker that he has yesterday credited you with ten millions—but still—! Is it not sweeter to hear the honest little pant of your engine; to feel that delicious sense of freedom and swiftness, to watch with joy the dusty miles vanishing under your silent wheels? Oh, wonderful and complicated toy, coming into this grim old world like another Eve, for the delight and torment of man, and giving him so bountiful a measure of both!

But Miss Schell, whose automobile innocence was that of Eden before the fall, harbored no

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suspensions of the tricky monster that bore her so fleetly and so well. All you need do was to wiggle a little doo-dub, press another, jerk a handle—and lo, you were a brother to the wind and a co-proprietor of the magic carpet! Is all happiness an illusion? Are there not carbureter troubles everywhere? Is not ignorance, after all, the very essential of bliss?

This great thought, unsolved, is passed up to the reader.

It was Miss Schell's automobile honeymoon, and Baby, perhaps conscious that a first impression is everything, put its best foot foremost, and never missed an explosion. In after days this astonishing ride was recalled with amazement. How did Baby do it? What unseen hand had averted fifty-five different and assorted kinds of trouble? Be that as it may, this was Baby Bullet's one sensational run. A run without a hitch of any kind. A run that might be termed a triumph. In three hours and eighteen minutes, Baby had accomplished forty-two miles. It seemed ready for forty-two miles more when the fall of night determined them to stop over at a little town that opportunely presented itself. Baby rolled blithely into the courtyard of the "Lord Nelson," and took a position alongside

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a big, familiar-looking car. Yes, very familiar! And there, beside the upraised hood, and fastidiously wiping off his cylinders with a handful of cotton-waste, was Mr. Mortimer Sutphen himself!

CHAPTER VI

THEY all had supper together in the deserted coffee-room. Or, at least, the Baby Bullets had, while Sutphen drank a Scotch and soda, and looked on. Sutphen had rather taken his welcome for granted. The broad-shouldered American was accustomed to be liked and sought after, and it never entered his head that his society on this occasion could possibly be regarded in any light but a compliment. His perceptions were dulled by his having no eyes for any one save Essy. She had been unmistakably glad to see him, and that, to Sutphen, seemed invitation enough. He did two very stupid things at that supper, which were afterward to be counted very seriously against him. He patronized Baby Bullet, and was ill-advised enough to find entertainment in the recital of Baby's troubles. Miss Schell was a good woman, and a sincere Christian, but Baby was as precious to her as a lame child to its mother,

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and she resented, just as keenly, any references to the infirmities of her darling. She burned with a hidden anger, which Sutphen might have noticed and placated had he not been so altogether absorbed in Essy. His second blunder was his attitude toward the Frenchman.

Alphonse was one of the most jealous creatures alive; and not only that, he was, besides, less than thin-skinned. He had, in fact, no skin at all. Here was the most charming adventure in his life threatened by the intrusion of a lordly being, who gazed at him as though he were air, and insulted him by a few perfunctory remarks that were obviously the outcome of mere politeness. The courtesy of the great is often tenfold more chilling than their anger. Sutphen, all unknown to himself, was oppressing the unfortunate Frenchman with an intolerable atmosphere of caste. The *mécanicien* listened in stony silence as he felt invisible walls rise up and separate him from the little party, in which, so lately, he had been received on the footing of an equal.

Sutphen went on making himself agreeable to Essy without the least thought of the storm he was raising in the bosoms of two of the party. If they appeared a little constrained and

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dull, he put it down to the fatigue of a long ride. Essy was the only thing he thought about, unfortunate man, and he exerted himself to make a good impression. His success was evident in her gaiety and laughter. Prolonged travels in the sole company of Miss Schell enhanced the value of a man—a nice man—to quite beyond what ordinarily she would have judged him worth. Besides, the whole situation was piquant and absurd; and Sutphen's ready comprehension and humor pleased her beyond measure. So they made friends over the tea-cups, and smiled into each other's faces, while Miss Schell glowered at the table-cloth, and Alphonse choked over his buttered scones.

After supper they stood in the doorway of the stuffy coffee-room, enjoying the warm summer air, and hardly knowing how to separate. Sutphen proposed a stroll, which was acidly negatived by Miss Schell. Essy, however, took him at his word, and recklessly volunteered to go. Miss Schell in vain pinched her arm, and did other painful telegraphing of the same nature, but Essy was not to be thwarted. The starlight tempted her; there seemed so much pent up within her that she had yet to say to Mr. Sutphen; besides, everybody at times has

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rebellious fits, and hers was fanned by Christine's ungraciousness.

"I'm afraid you're a very, very stupid man, Mr. Sutphen!" she said, as they followed one of the streets at random.

"You haven't taken long to find it out," he returned. "I've been trying to hide it, but it doesn't seem much use, does it?"

"If you want to play in our yard you must make yourself agreeable to Miss Schell!"

"I thought I had!"

"And say what you did about Baby Bullet? I held my breath I was so scared! She'll never forgive you."

"'Pon my soul—truly now—I never meant for a moment——"

"You don't know how badly it comes from a crack, new four-cylinder to slam its little brother. And you slammed Baby all round the block!"

Sutphen sighed.

"I meant it as a kind of jolly," he said.

"It isn't what you meant, but what you *did*! You've gone and queered yourself forever. You've queered me, too, for liking you. Didn't you notice how hard she tried to prevent me coming?"

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"No!"

"The chauffeur is cross, too. Why didn't you smooth him down? He's been so good to us; and all through supper he was gritting his teeth with fury!"

"That was the strawberry-jam!"

"No, it was *you*! You are irritatingly splendid and prosperous. When you don't notice people they seem to cease to exist—even to themselves! That's what ailed the Frenchman. You gave him one look, and wiped him off the slate!"

Sutphen was profoundly depressed.

"I thought I was the life and soul of the party," he declared miserably. "I thought I was whooping it up. I—I had no idea of all that—! Tell me, you aren't joking, are you?"

"No, indeed, I'm not! Really, Mr. Sutphen, they are offended—both of them. And it's awfully hard on me, you know, because I've taken quite a fancy to you!"

They walked on for a little while in silence. It was Saturday night, and the little country town was brightly lit, and the streets full of people. The general light-heartedness and jollity jarred on Sutphen's crushed spirit. It hurt him to think what a fool he had made of

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himself. Humor is a dangerous possession. Sometimes, like the anarchist's bomb, it blows up the anarchist!

"I'm the child of misfortune," he said. "I'm like the gazelle that always died, you know—or rather, the fellow that owned it, I mean. I thought I was working up to the time when we might join forces, and all go on together!"

"Oh, wouldn't that have been nice!"

"Is it too late now, do you think?"

"Oh, yes! This is our good-by walk. You are going to be cut off with a shilling!"

It seemed a dismal prospect. His trip had been lonely for all the pleasure he had got out of it. He was hungry for companionship. This Miss Lockhart was a wonderfully nice girl—no doubt about that—and really extraordinarily attractive. A man's kind of girl; a good fellow; a comrade. Her connection with Baby Bullet gave her, too, a sort of pathos in his eyes. She had such a fine automobile mind; she was fitted for the highest types; it was unnatural to mate her to this transmogrified cab which was so certain to cost her unending toil and trouble. He yearned to gather her into the four-cylinder—properly chaperoned, and all

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that—with Miss Schell, of course—and speed into space. Under the starlight, with the pressure of her hand on his arm, this thought appealed to all the romance of his nature. What a blankety-blank fool he had been to lose it all by pleasantries about Baby Bullet! Fatal, fatal pleasantries! He had intended to break the ice, and make conversation; but had succeeded, instead, in digging his own grave!

"Isn't it curious," said Essy, "to walk like this through the streets of a town I don't even know the name of, at the side of a man who is an utter stranger to me! Wouldn't it sound awful at home?"

"Not an utter stranger," returned Sutphen, with permissible warmth.

"Very close to it, I'm afraid!"

"They say it's the unexpected that makes the world tolerable!"

Essy laughed musically. She felt very safe and happy beside her big fellow-countryman. There was something so kind and brotherly about him, so deferential and full of respect. She could not help reflecting how much more winning this manner was than that of the ordinary male fascinator. He did not pay her any compliments; he did not try to hold her hand.

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He was content to be simply big and kind and good, like some splendid dog. She reflected, too, how agreeable it would be to own him, and wondered who did. Men like that were always snapped up in advance like the best cabins of a mail-steamer. Somewhere about him there was sure to be a ticket with "reserved" on it! At the moment it seemed to her quite disheartening.

They wandered on, following one of the streets till it brought them down to a little river. Here there were boats drawn up on the brink in charge of shabby specters who would take no denial. If you were rash enough to stop and look at a boat a shabby specter forthwith pushed you into it, and shoved you out with a boat-hook before you could say Jack Robinson. The English, for all their reputed slowness and conservatism, have as quick an eye for the main chance as anybody in Connecticut. Neither Essy nor Sutphen had intended to go on the river, but they suddenly found themselves in the middle of it afloat on a charming little skiff. Which simply again goes to prove how important it is in life to be able to say No. On second thoughts, however, they were both rather glad they hadn't said it. The warm dark

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night, the voices across the water, the shadowy banks with here and there a lighted house on the very edge, or some monster house-boat tucked in snugly against the trees—all these, with their suggestion of the unknown and the unseen, transported them into a fairyland that seemed to have been expressly arranged for their delectation. Sutphen pulled slowly up the nameless river, Essy guiding the skiff with the yoke-lines, and listening dreamily to the ripple along the keel.

What put it in her head to think of Bobby Fergusson? She had but the slightest acquaintance with Bobby. She would not have dared to call him so familiarly before his face. Indeed, the sight of Bobby would have been the signal for her to widen the existing distance between them. He was nothing but a rich, fast, silly young man, who had proved himself a thousand times a bore and an infliction. But his escapades had brought him to the social front, and people were accustomed to father on him any story that involved audacity or conspicuous impertinence.

Wonder of wonders, Mr. Sutphen was also slightly acquainted with Bobby! What a bond it seemed suddenly to make. Bobby instantly

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became of enormous importance. They fed pieces of him into the fire of their friendship, and it blazed stupendously. Here was common ground. Here was land at last. Here was Bobby! One can imagine castaways on a desert island—unintroduced castaways—stumbling after years, and then by the merest chance, on the name of a mutual acquaintance—and the immense significance the discovery would at once take on for them! So it was with Essy and Mortimer Sutphen. Bobby brought them yards nearer to each other. They both would have run a mile to avoid him, but here, on this sweet English river, Bobby's ghost was drawing their hands together. In fact, in the joy of finding Bobby, their opinion of him could not forbear changing for the better. Sutphen daresaid he wasn't such a bad chap as people made out. Essy remembered how good he had always been to his widowed sister. It was a regular Bobby boom!

When at last Sutphen proposed to tie up at a little island, and with Miss Lockhart's permission smoke a cigar—Bobby, as a subject of conversation, had completely expired. But he had served the purpose for which perhaps he had been created; he had been the means

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to bridge a chasm; he had brought two human souls very near.

"Do you know this is a pretty dangerous situation for two people to be in," said Sutphen, who had moved over to seat himself beside Essy in the stern, and who was now leaning back gazing at the stars through the smoke of his perfecto.

"Why?" she asked. "Isn't the boat big enough, or what?"

"A night like this makes a fellow so confoundedly confidential. There's a moment for indiscretion, I suppose, just as there is one for everything else. A sort of emotional tide in the affairs of men, you know! For two cents I'd tell you the story of my life—and then, of course, lead you on to tell yours!"

"I'm not old enough to have had any story—not much, that is—but I'd like tremendously to hear yours."

"We'll skip thirty-one years and come to last October!" Sutphen paused, chewing the end of his cigar meditatively. "I made an awful ass of myself last October. 'Pon my soul, I don't know why I should be boring you with all this—!" He paused again. Essy dabbled her hand in the cool water, and thought how

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rich and deep his voice sounded. "The fact is, I fell in love last October—and fell bad!"

"Lots of people have done that," said Essy encouragingly.

"Yes, but it was with the wrong girl, you see," Sutphen went on. "That was the rotten part of it, you know—to fall outrageously in love with a girl you despise. I knew a lot about her—too much about her altogether—so much, indeed, that I was on my guard. Heaven only knows what would have become of me if I hadn't. She has the face of an angel, with fluffy Madonna hair, and the kind of eyes that it is dangerous for a man to look into. Maddening eyes, you know. She moves in a swell set, and is excessively fashionable and all that—a regular little social climber, with a soul like a shriveled-up pea. A schemer, a grafter, a toady, a liar, and absolutely cynical—frankly, humorously cynical. Were she a sort of Becky Sharp, fighting for her own hand, one might make allowances. People—women—have to fight the world with what weapons they can, of course, and who can blame them? But she has position and money and all that, and doesn't have to. She does it because she likes it—because it is in her. She is as mean

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and calculating as though her bread and butter depended on it. She fawns on those so-called society leaders, and then flirts with their husbands—winning out double! ”

“ I don’t think I like her,” said Essy.

“ Neither do I! ” exclaimed Sutphen. “ I hate her right down to her little shoes—and yet the bother of it is that I love her too. Isn’t it a hole for a man to be in—isn’t it awful? ”

Essy agreed that it was awful.

“ That’s why I quit, and came to Europe with Benjy Bardeen. I hadn’t committed myself, but I was buzzing right into the candle. I suppose my attitude piqued her, and I—I—I! Not that she has a speck of heart—but I suppose it touched her vanity (her vanity is the humanest part of her, you know)—and so, taking advantage of a lucid interval, I jumped and ran! ”

“ And how did she like that? ”

“ Not particularly, I fancy. You know the kind of man that makes a dead set at every pretty woman that comes in his way—girl-chasers you know—scalpers—well, she’s the counterpart—the man-chaser! She isn’t happy till you’re dead, and then she takes your scalp and dances off! But I wouldn’t stay and be

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sculpt. It awakened a kind of interest in her. She professes to feel awfully cut up about it—heart-broken, you know—tries to make out that I——”

“Yes, that’s the place for you to stop,” said Essy.

“You mustn’t think I’m a conceited idiot,” he went on. “The only person she ever really cared about is herself. I know that well enough. I haven’t the faintest illusions about her. But with all my disapproval the outside of her sweeps me off my feet, for she’s the most beautiful and fetching thing you ever saw. There it is, you see. I love and hate her passionately—and what’s a poor devil to do?”

“Do you think she would——?”

“Well, she *might*——!”

“Hasn’t it worn off at all? I mean getting away, and seeing other people?”

“No, it’s worse than ever. I have to hold myself back from catching the first outgoing steamer. I can’t even pass a cable-office without short-circuiting inside!”

Sutphen relapsed into silence. He dropped his cigar overboard, where it sizzled out, and floated down the stream. He leaned back with both hands behind his head—always a char-

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acteristic attitude of his. For Essy the pleasure of the evening had somehow melted away. She felt unaccountably lonely and sad and out of spirits. It wasn't jealousy of this unknown girl—that would be too preposterous—but rather a bitterness at the cross-purposes of life, the unsuspected sorrows, the profitless twistings and turnings of fate.

"Now it's your turn," said Sutphen. "No doubt you have a heartache too. Everybody has."

Essy pondered before answering. She was almost ashamed that she had no romance to confess to, no tangle of unfortunate hearts. But a long pause, she thought, would be suggestive of what she regretted did not exist. It came over her, almost in the light of self-defense, that she must invent something suitable to the occasion. The position otherwise would be too wounding to her self-respect. She must not allow Mr. Sutphen to regard her as a possible consoler. To admit being fancy-free was almost like an invitation.

"Yes, I have loved, too," she said at last. "Desperately, hopelessly, irretrievably."

Sutphen started. He was unprepared for such an admission. Perhaps he did have some

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far-away thoughts of consolation that were now so rudely disturbed.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "who would have thought it! Why, I can't tell you how surprised I am to hear it!"

His surprise was patently not of the agreeable variety.

"Oh, it's too sad for anything!" Essy continued. "I can never marry him, you know—not at least till it all rolls away, and his name is cleared. Perhaps that will never come! Perhaps he may end it all, as he has so often threatened, by some rash and terrible deed. He is so despairing, you know, so reckless—and mine is the only hand that has ever been held out to help him!"

She laid it, a very chubby, girlish hand, on the gunwale of the boat. Sutphen gazed at it respectfully. It had a new meaning for him now.

"But I cannot tell you about it," she went on. "You mustn't ask me to. . . . But I wanted you to know, that I, too, had suffered!"

She shut her eyes, and in imagination saw this phantom proprietor of her being. He was tall and dark and astoundingly handsome; lithe, quick, and tigerish in his movements—wicked and abandoned, with a price upon his head, and

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every man's hand against him. In his stern, gloomy, and lawless character there existed but a single spark of good—his passionate devotion to herself! The pathos of it all brought the tears to her eyes. Yes, she loved him. Others might call him bad. Others might track him down to kill him. But she loved him—loved him——!

"It's too bad," said Sutphen sympathetically. "It's what I call damned pitiful. You have no idea how it cuts me all up."

Through the darkness Essy could feel his compassionate eyes resting upon her face.

"Do you know what we two are?" he said mournfully. "We're love's martyrs—that's what we are. Shake on it, little girl, and let us both try to buck up."

He held out his hand, and Essy shook it.

"I suppose there is nothing else for us to do," she said.

"We've played and lost," he returned. "We must face up to that, of course. But we can be good to each other, can't we?"

Essy, in a ghost of a voice, admitted that this might be possible.

And to this their broken hearts replied: "Amen!"

CHAPTER VII

TIME, that multicylinder Panhard of the universe, and the worst of speeders, whom no village constable has ever yet arrested, nor any police magistrate contrived to bring to book—time, the smooth-running, perfect-sparking, unpuncturable racer, played one of its usual pranks when man and maid get together, and revealed the horrifying hour of eleven-thirty as Essy crept up to bed. She guiltily regarded the sleeping form of Miss Schell, and trembled lest it might suddenly rise in judgment against her; and then, blowing out the candle, she undressed in the dark, said a sneaky little prayer, and tumbled in. It seemed as though she had hardly more than closed her eyes before she awoke with a start, to find Miss Schell seated grimly beside her, shaking her by the shoulder.

“Get up!” said Miss Schell.

“W-w-what time is it?” asked Essy, recognizing a very early brand of sunshine peeping through the shutters.

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"Get up!" repeated Miss Schell.

Essy felt for the watch under her pillow. It said half past four! She sleepily confronted Miss Schell with the awful fact.

"Breakfast is ordered for five," said Miss Schell, "and Mr. Bocher is getting Baby ready for an early start!"

"But why?" pleaded Essy.

"We're going to try and lose that horrid man," returned Miss Schell.

"Horrid who?" asked Essy, sitting up and forlornly accepting a pair of long black stockings.

"Your Mr. Sutphen," went on Miss Schell vindictively. "He's trying to fasten himself on to us. He sees we are unprotected. Your pretty face has caught his attention, and he's the kind of a wretch who sticks at nothing!"

"You're too silly for anything! Nobody could be nicer nor more respectful!" The prospect of losing Mr. Sutphen irritated Essy exceedingly.

"The admiration of some men is an insult!"

Essy wanted to know why the presence of Alphonse was any less compromising than that of his late master.

"Mr. Bocher is different!" exclaimed Miss

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Schell. "He is with us in a menial capacity. It is like having a maid or a butler!"

"Can't see it," said Essy. "I'm sure Papa wouldn't approve of me roaming over England with a strange Frenchman. If I give up Mr. Sutphen, you ought to give up Alphonse!"

"He's going to put Baby Bullet in first-class condition, teach me to run her, and then leave," said Miss Schell. "I think that's a pretty big order on his good nature already, and I wouldn't dream of extending it!"

Essy yawned—or was it a sigh?—and submitted to the inevitable. It was something to have escaped a lecture for having stayed out so late the night before. In this respect, at least, she felt herself honestly open to criticism. But it was a sad, dreary, blank of a world, and the loss of her four-cylinder admirer struck her to the heart. Later on, as they mounted Baby in the stable, the sight of Sutphen's noble giant beside them oppressed her with added pangs. The possession of that magnificent sixty-horse car cast a sort of glory over the man that owned it. Essy was as sorry to say good-by to the one as to the other. When again would a sixty-horse—car or man—obtrude itself into her little, insignificant life?

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Soon they were beyond the town, and speeding north again. Baby ran well and developed more speed than it had ever shown before—doing a good sixteen miles, and occasionally taking a hill or two on the high. Except for an unaccountable boiling in its water-tank, and a consequent cloud of steam from the escape-pipe, it would have satisfied the most exacting of experts. But Alphonse drove her with a very worried expression, his face betraying occasional spasms of pain, as though there were troubles in his own anatomy. Such is the perfect chauffeur, to whom a faulty valve, or the faint moaning of distressed metal, is as afflicting as a personal toothache. The water boiled away so fast that twice they had to stop, and fill up at farmhouses. On each of these occasions it was hard to restart the motor, which turned over so stiffly that it nearly cranked the heart out of poor Alphonse. It was overheating somewhere, of course, but the where was the difficulty, the working parts being so idiotically hidden out of all sight or touch. It is a comfortable automobile maxim that troubles often right themselves, and thus sustained, they proceeded on their way—boiling.

The morning wore away. They had lunch

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in the little garden of a Cyclists' Rest—a cross kind of lunch—Alphonse moody about the overheating; Miss Schell snappy and contradictory; Essy burning with a subdued indignation over the loss of Mr. Sutphen. She felt ill-used and imposed upon, and was at no pains to conceal her sentiments. How rude it would seem to Mr. Sutphen! How inexplicable! The only consoling thought was that he would surely absolve her from any hand in this absurd conspiracy to desert him. But what a blow it would be to him, to descend and find them gone! She had been hustled away so fast that she had been unable to leave a little note of regret. That was the least she could have done—a nice little note of explanation and farewell. Now that he was altogether lost and done with, Essy felt very tenderly toward him.

Afterward, as they got into Baby and again took the road, she could not resist looking back at times in the hope of perhaps seeing him. A man with a jaw like that wasn't likely to give up easily. But suppose that he had overslept, or had got a puncture, or had broken down? She wondered, too, if she had overestimated her own attraction for him. What if he tamely acquiesced in her departure, and smoked the

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cigar of resignation? It would not be like him to do that. She couldn't imagine him doing that. His general air of success precluded the idea. It would be a point of honor with him not to let her escape. It would whet his pursuit. Yes, he was certain to follow!

Miss Schell, too, kept looking back—giving apprehensive little peeps like a tall thin Russian, expectant of wolves. There was something very grim in her expression, as though, if need be, she wouldn't hesitate to shoot. Alphonse, crouching over the steering lever, was hastening Baby on the open throttle, and taking favorable grades like the Empire State Express. Essy smiled at this pitiful attempt to outrun Sutphen, whose sixty horse-power offered him an irresistible advantage if he cared to avail himself of it. As well might a gosling try to escape a healthy panther!

Suddenly Miss Schell gave a convulsive start, and poked the chauffeur beside her. Essy turned, and saw a swift and distant speck furiously approaching them in a cloud of dust! It was the four-cylinder overtaking them like a cyclone, and performing the prodigy of a mile a minute! It may have been less; let it be understood that the writer does not commit

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himself; but the way it shot into view, and increased its size in a prolonged and lightning rush, could only be described by the word appalling. The Baby Bullets had the agonizing sense of being in a hand-car, and obstructing the track of some mighty Limited.

Alphonse threw out his clutch, applied both brakes, and came to a standstill with the instant readiness of a well-rehearsed program. Not a word was spoken. The throttled engine pounded sullenly. Miss Schell descended, and taking out a large paper bag from beneath the seat began to tilt forth its contents in a snaky line across the highway. Essy could hardly believe her eyes. The paper bag contained broken glass of a bottle-green complexion, and the shocking nature of its purpose burst on her like a crime. Before she could pull herself together; before she could even cry out or expostulate, Miss Schell had leaped up into Baby again, and the little car was lurching forward!

Miss Schell glowed with sinister triumph. Alphonse's face underwent the expressions of another Cain, and his guilty eyes furtively avoided Essy's horrified and avengeful gaze. The Unforgivable Sin had been committed—

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openly—shamelessly—dog eating dog—under the affronted dome of high Heaven. *Miss Schell and Alphonse had deliberately plotted to puncture the four-cylinder!*

With fascinated curiosity Essy watched and waited. Sutphen could plainly be seen now, bent almost double over his wheel. Essy offered up a little prayer that he had not seen this dastardly attempt to wreck his terrific progress—and then another—that he had, and would take the means to circumvent it. On he came, the sun sparkling on his brilliant lamps; the dust spurting high behind the tonneau; the chuck-chuck-chuck of the powerful engine thrilling the ear with its swift and perfect action. He was across the deadline in a flash. Thank Heaven, not a bit the worst for it—the five-inch French tires, inflated to bursting by the heat of racing, spurned the glass as though they had been fluffs of cotton. Essy tingled with relief. The unsportsmanlike trick had failed. The great car, panting its giant breaths, was bounding on unhurt, and doing forty to Baby's frantic two.

Pop!

Pop!

Pop!

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Miss Schell looked exultantly at Alphonse. He bowed his humiliated head. He had never done a mean thing in his life before, and now, at the bidding of a woman, he had lost his automobile honor! He was unable to rejoice over it. He would recall it in after years with an intolerable remorse. As for Essy, she was speechless with indignation. The premeditation of the crime seemed to give it an added horror. Words were too pale to express her feelings. She would cable to her father—she would leave Miss Schell at the next stopping-place—she would catch the express steamer at Southampton—! And all the while, Baby sped on, boiling furiously and wafting over its occupants an occasional breath of ominously hot air. Far, far behind it on the road might be seen the solitary figure of Mortimer Sutphen, jacking up the wreck. Let us not regard him too closely, nor overhear the impulsive expression of his disapproval. Three punctures on practically new tires, and only two spare inner tubes in the kit! Have *you* ever taken off the shoe of a five-inch tire? Have *you* ever dug the strippers into that recalcitrant material, and pitted your own puny strength against the superiority of rubber? Imagine the dreary

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episode multiplied by three, and then drop a tear for Sutphen!

We will not stay to watch him. Let us rather follow Baby, and rejoice that evil does not invariably escape an avenging hand. The boiling grew worse—a loud, bumpy, frenzied boiling—and at times the noses of the Baby Bullets were affronted by the unmistakable smell of hot engine. It is a terrifying and warning smell of a peculiar pungency. Alphonse stopped twice to let Baby cool, and to refill the water-tank. Very little was said during these intervals. Essy showed by her frozen manner that she had washed her hands of her two companions. She affected an absolute lack of interest in Baby's complaint, wandering away from the others, and sitting stiffly by the roadside until she was called. Miss Schell well knew there was a slumbering powder-magazine in that young lady, and had no desire to set it off.

She and her fellow-conspirator talked together in low, anxious tones. Alphonse burrowed under the car, and was handed tools one by one. He emerged looking very depressed. Essy overheard him say something about "the collar binding"—and some more about the

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"dog." But she didn't care! Let the collar bind! Her only thought was of the man they had wronged. Suppose he should include her in the general guilt! No, that wasn't possible. It was a good thing that she had told him of the others' ill will. This would clear her of any complicity. But would it? she asked herself with gnawing doubt. Would it? Of course, he was nothing to her, and she would never see him again, but, all the same, she did not wish to lie under suspicion. It would spoil his memory of that evening on the river. Three tires! Wasn't it awful!

It took a long time for the engine to cool, and on each occasion it was harder than ever to restart the motor. The second time it seemed almost impossible. Alphonse had to rest off, and reluctantly allowed Miss Schell to try. She cranked till she lay down on the road and had to be fanned. Essy kept her distance, and never volunteered to help. She wore an expression of listless indifference. At last, when the poor old overheated thing caught the spark, and began to turn over, she refused to join in the enthusiasm of the others. All she did was to come obediently when she was called.

"What do you want, dear?" asked Miss

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Schell kindly, as Essy stood beside Baby, and felt under the seat.

"Only this," returned Essy, pulling out a second paper bag, and quelling her friend's gaze with a look of outraged innocence. It contained eight or nine pounds of broken glass, which Essy carried to the side of the road and scattered in the grass. Nothing was said as she returned and took her place on the little bob seat. Alphonse got very busy, and shot Baby ahead, while Miss Schell pretended to become violently interested in the landscape. Essy maintained her air of frigid reserve, and assumed a nobody's-darling expression. It was very efficacious in lowering the spirits of both the other Baby Bullets, on whose brows a sense of guilt was already imprinting an unseen brand.

It did not take many miles to start the water boiling worse than ever. The collar, or the dog, or whatever it was, interfered even more than before with the proper working of the machinery. Waves of hot engine began to rise and choke them. The odor of fried cylinder-oil added a new and discouraging note. Very serious disorders were evidently developing beneath them, and Essy prepared to skip lightly off in case the gasoline caught fire. She coldly

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passed on her apprehension to Miss Schell, with a result that was gratifying to her own ill humor. For a moment Miss Schell's confidence in Baby was ruthlessly shaken. It was some time before Alphonse could reassure her. Even then the reassurance lacked a convincing quality. The pistons were beginning to stick, and it became increasingly difficult to engage the high-speed clutch. At last it refused to engage at all. The engine slowed down. The engine stopped!

"Must we get out and let it cool again?" asked Miss Schell.

Alphonse faltered.

"The gears have overheated and stuck," he muttered.

"What does that mean exactly?"

"It means," said Essy, taking the words out of the Frenchman's mouth, "it means we have been properly served for puncturing Mr. Sutphen. It means that it will take a whole machine-shop to get Baby Bullet to move another inch."

Alphonse confirmed the dreary fact.

Miss Schell's eyes were smarting as she descended. Baby had betrayed her. Baby had broken down.

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"We'll make a nice spectacle for Mr. Sutphen when he whizzes past us," said Essy cruelly.

Alphonse ground his teeth. The remark stung him. He groveled under the car, and was heard hammering vindictively. It didn't do any good, but it acted as a salve to his feelings. Hammer, hammer, hammer, and then a subdued French oath. Miss Schell stood disconsolately beside the little wagon, hoping against hope, and dropping scalding tears on the mud-guard. Essy tried to resist the relenting that was stealing over her at the sight of her companion's distress. At this moment of acute misery they were suddenly all electrified by the sound of a horn, and Sutphen was upon them! Yes, in his great, splendid, massive car, choo-chooing on the open throttle as though he meant to charge right through them!

Miss Schell cowered. Alphonse hunched himself close within the cramped space below Baby Bullet, and watched the approach of his ex-master through one of the artillery wheels. Essy flushed scarlet, and waited suffocatingly for Sutphen to pass on and disappear. Waited for—and was proudly willing to receive—a glance of burning scorn that would concentrate

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into a single second all the pent-up fury of those three punctures! Wonder of wonders, he was stopping! Did he mean to thrash the unfortunate Frenchman? Or was it to get off some expression of his indignation? She sought his face for an answer to these questions. Good Heavens, he was smiling. He positively looked *jolly*! There was a twitch—a shiver of his cheek—an odd quizzical twinkle of his eyes that said, plainer than any words: "Follow my cue!"

He sprang out of the car, and advanced with exuberant good humor, talking very fast as though to forestall any awkward explanations.

"Say, what's all this?" he cried. "Baby broken down! Great Scott, what's the matter with the little car? I've been in trouble, too, worse luck! Punctured! Three of them, all in a row—a broken bottle or something! Guess it looks like another tow, doesn't it? Well, here I am at your service, and really glad to be able to help out!"

Miss Schell in a single vivid glance flung herself on Essy's mercy.

Essy was unable to resist the appeal. Apart from the promptings of her natural generosity,

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she was quick to see the obvious advantage of ignoring the broken-glass incident.

"We all felt sure you'd soon overtake us," she said sweetly.

Then Miss Schell, trembling, added her mite.

"I think you must be our good angel, Mr. Sutphen," she said. "This is the second time you've come to our rescue!"

CHAPTER VIII

SUTPHEN was boisterously friendly. Warned by his previous mistakes, he now spared no pains to earn Miss Schell's and Alphonse's good-will. Nobody was ever so helpful, so gay, so royal in offering assistance! He took Baby in his arms, so to speak—took them all in his arms—arrogating to himself the position of the strong man of the party, with shoulders broad enough to bear all their troubles. Alphonse had hardly got one leg out from under Baby Bullet when he found himself once more engaged in Sutphen's service. By the time he had got out his second leg his wages had been raised. At regular intervals, like the minute-gun at sea, Sutphen praised Baby to the skies! Essy was convulsed at this lightning courtship of Miss Schell, and almost resentful. The artifice was so clumsy—and so successful!

Sutphen applied himself with ardor to the problem of Baby. He, too, crawled underneath, and had an examination. It was too bad, too bad, he said that one little fault like

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a binding collar should have been allowed to pass notice on such a magnificent French car. But automobilists had to bow their heads to such delinquencies. There was no such thing as a perfect car, pay what you will! Look at his own, for instance. He could assure Miss Schell that he had had endless trouble with it. Alphonse would bear him out in that! Alphonse would remember that one of the valve-stems was too long. Alphonse wore a puzzled expression, but answered, "Yes, yes," with alacrity. He was in the humor to answer "Yes, yes," to anything—that is, to Sutphen, and if such seemed the reply that would please. His ruffled feelings had been smoothed down, and he felt himself comfortably settled in life again. It warmed him through and through, especially now that his salary had been raised to eight hundred francs! Sutphen had been particular to use the word "salary." He had put a close watch on himself, and was taking infinite pains to be agreeable.

Once, as he passed close to Essy, he whispered: "Aren't you proud of me?"

And she laughingly whispered back: "Be careful, or you'll turn Miss Schell's head and make me jealous!"

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Be that as it may, in ten minutes Sutphen was the acknowledged master of their destinies. In their general helplessness his will suddenly became the law of their being. He had the chain stripped off Baby, thus freeing the driving wheels from the clogged transmission, and the Manila rope made its second appearance in their midst. Baby was again made fast to its powerful brother, submitting with docility to the position that it seemed best able to fill. Baby towed beautifully. Nobody could deny that. Its troubles only arose when it trusted to what Miss Schell called "its ownty-tonty little engine."

When they decided to proceed, Sutphen concluded the conquest of Miss Schell's heart by proposing that she herself should steer Baby! With excited humility she protested her inability to do so. The idea fascinated her, but she had never done anything like it before—! If you pull the lever this way, will the car go that way—? It was all very well to say it was easy—! But Alphonse must sit beside her and watch her like a hawk! Alphonse must be ready to take the thing quick in case she lost her head. She wouldn't answer for not doing that—! And Mr. Sutphen would go very

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slowly at first, wouldn't he? And suppose she used the emergency brake instead of the—the transmission, would that make any difference? Oh, it locked, did it? Stuck where you put it! And this handle on the lever was the release? How simple it was when it was all explained! And the other was the reverse? But if she pressed it by mistake for the—the transmission brake, would Baby reverse? Oh, it wouldn't because the engine wasn't working! Oh, yes, of course! But if it *were* working, it would reverse, wouldn't it? How easy it was when you once got hold of the idea!

At length the start was made, Miss Schell giving delighted little screams as Baby forged forward and impulsively tried to ram the car ahead. Essy was seated beside Sutphen in the big car, and as their eyes met they both broke into uncontrollable laughter.

"It takes more than broken glass to keep me down," Sutphen said, as he recovered a little. "But say, it was a mean thing to do—now wasn't it?"

"I had made up my mind to cable Papa and take the first steamer home! I was so angry I couldn't talk, or anything."

"Good old Baby!" exclaimed Sutphen.

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"Baby's on my side, anyway. Didn't it break down in just the right place?"

"I can't understand why you are so forgiving about it," said Essy. "You must have had an awful time. You must have felt like shooting us!"

"Only for a moment. Not *you*, of course. I knew you were incapable of such a thing—but the others, I mean—especially when I found that some of the lugs had rusted in. Then I saw I had more to lose than to gain by getting cross about it!"

"Lose?" cried Essy. "Lose what?"

"You," returned Sutphen succinctly.

She colored faintly under his glance.

"You are awfully nice," he went on. "You are well worth three punctures. Besides, I had some pride, you know, in getting back into your friend's good graces. I still felt guilty for having slammed Baby Bullet, and wanted to make it up; and this, I fancy, was just my Heaven-sent opportunity."

"Well, you certainly took it!"

"Yes, didn't I? Was ever anybody so angelic? Didn't I pile it on about Baby, and raise Bocher's wages? I would have offered anything to anybody!"

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"I wonder what's going to happen next?" said Essy.

"Who cares?"

Sutphen was the picture of smiling recklessness. He was in one of those rare humors when a man is content to live for the moment, and does not look beyond. He had no plans, no ulterior intentions, no anything. It delighted him to just sit beside Essy, and feel the warm summer air against his cheek. To a practised ear every running car has a myriad voices, and when all these voices are in tune and happy, a sense of satisfaction steals over the chauffeur as lulling as angels' songs. Combine this satisfaction with the company of a charming girl whose frank eyes do not hide the approval she feels for you—and you have a man who may well say to himself, that all is for the best, in the best of possible worlds.

"Yes, who cares!" said Essy, abandoning herself no less to the fleeting hour.

Behind them, tugging wildly at its string, Baby Bullet was zigzagging like a chunky little heifer at the tail of a farmer's gig. Miss Schell, with a resolute and convulsed expression, and holding the tiller with the desperation of a drowning man clinging to an oar, was guiding

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the unruly Despardoux on its frenzied career. It seemed to feel that authority was relaxed, and that it was at liberty to take every advantage of this pale and trembling beginner—rushing, and kicking up, and balking, and slewing round, and in a hundred ways scandalously misbehaving. After repeated attempts it finally managed to bump into Sutphen's rear lamp and smash it all to pieces, destroying its own gas headlight in the process. It next tried to nip the steel step of the big car, with a disastrous reaction on its own radiator tubes. It seemed to think it a good joke, too, to skid its rear wheels with the emergency brake, and handicap the tow by adding three tons more to the traction! But Miss Schell did not allow these trifles to interfere with her enjoyment, and hung on like grim death, fiercely exultant in Baby's devastating course. When at last they halted she could hardly unclinch the fingers of her hand, so cramped had they become by their long and tenacious grasp of the tiller.

Not that Miss Schell was a whit disillusioned of "automobiling." She was in a glow of triumph at her own prowess, and no chauffeur permitted for the first time to try out a ninety horse racer on the track could have been

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more self-complacent. She felt that she had performed a wonderful feat, and modestly received as her due the plaudits of the rest of the company. Those, as may be imagined, were forthcoming in no unstinted measure, though inspired by very different motives; Alphonse from humble devotion, Essy from a not unkind love of mischief, Sutphen from a deep and crafty policy. He, the big American, was determined to capture Miss Schell, bag and baggage; and as Alphonse made tea from a beautiful silver-plated outfit that was carried in the big car, Sutphen stationed himself close to Miss Schell, and purred Baby-praise into her ear.

It was delightful to camp like that beside the road, their table-cloth one of the rugs from the car, and others comfortably spread out by way of seats. It was a relaxing and confidential moment, with tea-cups passing, and buttered scones, while every one laughed and talked with the zest of children at a picnic. Sutphen offered a prize for the best name for his car. If they were to go on together, Baby would continue to be called Baby, while his would speedily degenerate into "the other." That didn't suit him at all, he said. He wanted

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something that would stand up well beside Baby Bullet.

Alphonse proposed the "Passepartout," after Phineas Fogg's immortal valet; and when this was dismissed as too Frenchy he followed it up by "The Yellow Peril"!

"But we aren't yellow," said Sutphen, "and aren't a peril—so I think we'll count you out on that, Alphonse. Besides," he went on, "it's a mistake to give such names to cars. I had a friend once who was arrested for speeding, and the evidence was pretty well in his favor till somebody popped up and wanted to know what the car was called. He blurted out 'Skinned Lightning,' which, of course, instantly cost him fifteen dollars!"

"What do you all think of 'Baby's Brother'?" said Essy. "It sounds sociable and friendly and gives it a kind of family ring."

"'Baby's Brother' is good," said Sutphen judiciously.

Miss Schell shook her head with decision.

"It's too confusing," she said. "It's like naming them both the same. They'd wind up by being Big Baby and Little Baby—which wouldn't do at all!"

"My own idea would be something like

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'The Flyaway,'" said Sutphen. "Over the hills and fly away—see?"

"Save that up till you get an air-ship," said Essy. "Besides, I'd always think of it as 'over the hills to the poorhouse'—which is so true of automobiling that it would always hurt."

"I was on a cattle-ranch once," began Miss Schell, laying her hands in her lap, and collecting eyes in an austere schoolma'am fashion, "and there was a bronco there that everybody dreaded to ride. But there were so many of us that it had to be ridden, anyway. When people would get off they always gasped out: 'Gee whiz, what a horse!' 'Gee whiz, did you ever see anything like that!' Finally the vaqueros discovered it, and actually named it Gee Whiz—which is still its name, if it hasn't killed itself since climbing trees, or trying to dance on one leg! Now why not Gee Whiz for the big car?"

The name was received with acclamation. It was so patriotically American, so suggestive, so breezy and friendly. Miss Schell leaned back with the proud consciousness of having scored a hit. Sutphen proposed that Gee Whiz should be christened forthwith. But it was all very well to say christened; the question now became

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what with? Water was unlucky; tea, in such a connection, was almost degrading; champagne was the proper thing, or a flask of good old Bourbon—and they had neither. Essy came to the rescue with a bottle of eau de cologne. Sutphen remarked there was something sweetly innocent about eau de cologne, and yet no one could say it wasn't spirituous, for there had been well-known instances of women becoming dipsomaniacs through its use. He knew a governess once who used to take a few drops of it on a lump of sugar and get very happy and talkative.

The christening took place with becoming formality. Sutphen gave his arm to Essy, while Alphonse grandiloquently offered his to Miss Schell, and the little party assembled beside the upraised bonnet of the big car. Two passing children were called up, and were promised sixpence each to cheer.

"You're the multitude," said Sutphen to the bewildered little ones. "The moment the pretty lady breaks the bottle you are to raise a shout and throw your caps in the air!"

Wonderingly, they were rehearsed in this part of the program, and obediently raised a solemn little sample cheer.

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"Louder!" demanded Sutphen.

"A whole sixpence worth of yell!" exclaimed Essy.

"Like this," added Alphonse, suddenly going off in a series of blood-curdling screams.

"Now," said Sutphen, putting up one hand impressively.

"I christen thee Gee Whiz," said Essy, breaking the bottle on one of the cylinders.

"Hurrah!" shouted the multitude, with painstaking enthusiasm.

They were left on the highway, munching cake, and each with a sixpence in a grubby little paw, while Gee Whiz and Baby Bullet whisked away in a cloud of dust.



“I christen thee Gee Whiz.”



CHAPTER IX

THAT night at supper in a bulgy old inn, Sutphen brought up the subject of their all going on together.

"Why not?" he asked, persuasively eyeing Miss Schell.

Miss Schell took a few moments to consider.

"Just let me tag along, too," added Sutphen. "I won't hamper you in any way. Let's drift like ships on a painted ocean, you know, without plans or anything, staying at the places we like, and working up to the Lake District and into Scotland."

"No!" said Miss Schell.

Essy's face fell at this uncompromising decision.

"Think over it well," went on Sutphen. "Losing me won't matter very much, I know; but what about Alphonse here? He is the one person in England who is capable of keeping Baby on the move."

"Yes, think of Baby," said Essy.

"I guarantee it," cried Alphonse. "Yes;

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mademoiselle, do not lightly dispense with the services of one you will find it impossible to replace."

"It would not be proper. It would not be proper at all. It would be highly *improper*!" Miss Schell bit a piece of toast at each of these remarks, and looked sternly round the table.

"Aren't you taking rather a—" began Sutphen, thinking to himself that a lady of thirty-five, even if unmarried, counted for sufficient social ballast in the ship of convention.

"Of course, I'm not young—but I'm young enough to still have a reputation."

This was politely acceded. The situation obviously called for that, and Sutphen hastened to put himself on record.

"So has she!" added Miss Schell, pointing at Essy with her teaspoon.

Essy looked depressed at this uncontrovertible fact.

"And then you are too young and too good-looking!"

"It seems invidious not to include Alphonse too," said Sutphen.

"Yes, Mr. Bocher too!"

"We are both too handsome, *mon cher*," said Sutphen dismally to the *mécanicien*.

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"Mademoiselle exaggerates," protested that worthy follower energetically. "Nobody—not even the women who have honored me with their affection—have ever called me zo—and as for Mr. Sutphen, now I beg you all, regard him—critically, without bias, could any one—except perhaps his mother——"

"Stop!" roared Sutphen.

"It is true, all ze same. Only last week the chambermaid at the Hotel Windsor said to me——"

"The chambermaid's remarks on my personal appearance are overruled!"

"Nobody could criticize us for the way we have already been thrown together," continued Miss Schell. "It was unayoidable, and if need be, we could always take shelter behind Baby Bullet—but that is no reason why we should go on, and live and die together!"

"No, let's cut the dying out," said Sutphen.

"We need the protection of a married woman!" Miss Schell enunciated this statement with the air of a Lawrence refusing to give up the ship.

"Then the thing to do is to get a married woman!"

"Where?"

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"Surely, there must be a lot of them in a place like England."

"A lady," added Miss Schell.

"I reckon there must be a few million of them too!"

Essy rippled into smiles at the big man's earnestness. He was so masterful, so determined, as he waved away every fresh objection with his large hand. It was immensely flattering to be fought for in this uncompromising fashion. He had such an air of always getting what he wanted—of not counting the expense nor the trouble—of being ready to meet anything once his mind was made up. It seemed such a rich and splendid attitude toward life, the attitude of a man who had never been beaten, to whom success fell as almost a birth-right. Essy had a delicious sense that she was falling under his ascendancy. It both pleased and frightened her. It was a new sensation, full of a shy, guilty enjoyment.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," cried Sutphen in the tone of inspiration. "I'll telegraph to the American Consul—in London, you know!"

"The American Consul!" ejaculated Miss Schell.

"Yes—for a reduced gentlewoman!"

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"Does he have a stock of them?" asked Essy.

"Well, it's just like this," said Sutphen; "there are always people turning up at the consulate who have lost their money, or their friends, or their minds, or their steamer-ticket—or whatever it is. They lean on the consul and ask him what he is going to do about it. I know I've never called at any of our big foreign consulates without it costing me all the way from five to fifty dollars. There is always a number of those distressed Americans, and no small number of them are women. The consul has no official means of helping them, and his usual method is to pass round the hat—I mean when he has investigated the story and found it true. I don't doubt but what at this moment there are half a dozen choice old ladies sitting on the consulate doorstep."

"It's sad, isn't it!" remarked Miss Schell. "I cannot think of anything more terrible than being stranded in a distant country."

"My offer will come like a ray of sunshine," said Sutphen. "Alphonse, get me a telegraph form!"

"I don't know whether I've agreed to it

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yet," objected Miss Schell. "It's—it's—so sudden and reckless!"

"You said all you wanted was a chaperon. Well, I'm going to get you one!"

"But there are all kinds of old ladies," murmured Miss Schell feebly.

"I'll telegraph for a good one—gentle—iron-clad respectability—guaranteed to give satisfaction!"

Miss Schell sat dazed as Sutphen spread out the sheet and began to write in the coolest manner imaginable.

"How is this?" he asked. "United States Consul-General, Consulate, Victoria Street, London, W. Have immediate need of a married woman, elderly preferred, respectability essential, to act as chaperon for two young ladies with me on an automobile tour of at most six weeks. Will pay twenty-five a week and expenses, including first-class fare from London to——"

Sutphen paused, and got out his road-map, running a large thumb in a very businesslike manner over the heart of England.

"What's the name of this old town, anyway?" he asked.

Nobody knew.

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Alphonse was sent to the office to find out. He came back, saying it was Huddersfield.

"What's the matter with Wye?" said Sutphen, running up his thumb forty miles. "You see, it is in pretty bold-looking type, which means that it is quite a place, and this lot of contour lines indicates picturesqueness—and with Baby on our hands we mustn't get too ambitious." As he said this he got to work at the telegram again. "From London to Wye, at which place please telegraph your answer care of post-office. I shall be in Wye by four o'clock to-morrow afternoon and will meet lady if notified of train's arrival. Am telegraphing you ten pounds on account. Mortimer Sutphen."

He passed the telegram round for general approval.

Miss Schell read it in silence till she came to the six weeks.

"That's altogether too long," she demurred.

"You are to be my guests," said Sutphen.

"You, and Miss Lockhart, and Baby Bullet."

"It's too much to accept from an utter stranger."

"I'm glad you said that," he remarked. "I want to get this utter-stranger business out of

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the road while Alphonse is seeing to the telegram."

The Frenchman was dismissed with a ten-pound note. The ease and speed of the whole performance left the two ladies dumb with astonishment. They felt themselves being borne along in a torrent that admitted of no back-pedaling. As Essy remarked, there was nothing to do but gasp and pray.

Sutphen drew out his pocketbook and produced three letters which he passed over to Miss Schell. The first, in formal and diplomatic language, requested the good offices of all the American representatives abroad in respect to the bearer, Mr. Mortimer Sutphen, of New York, and bore the impressive signature of the Secretary of State. The second was a warm, friendly, offhand letter, beginning "Dear old Morty," from a man whose name was a household word throughout the land. The third was a receipted bill for "Gee Whiz."

"Surely that settles the utter stranger," he said.

"I felt all the time that you were somebody important," said Essy.

"By Jove, did you now!" Sutphen was de-

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lighted at the naive compliment. Nothing is pleasanter for a prince in masquerade than to be recognized at his true worth. A pair of beautiful and discerning brown eyes aided by a fine feminine intuition had established his social position without the need of documentary evidence.

"I guess it was your kind of spoiled-child manner," continued Essy, "and the look that goes with people always jumping to hand you things!"

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Sutphen, "so that's how you knew? I hoped it was what-d'ye-call-um—distinction, you know—and all that!"

"Charm, anyway," conceded Essy.

Sutphen gazed at her radiantly.

"Isn't it jolly it's all settled?" he said, including Miss Schell in his beaming smile. "It's the unexpected that makes life worth living. Here was I fooling along, the bluest and lonest man in England, when ker-plunk, I towed right into the nicest thing that ever happened!"

"We too!" added Essy.

"It almost seems like the finger of Providence," ejaculated Miss Schell.

Here was Sutphen's chance to shine. There

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was only one way to Miss Schell's heart, and he straightway took it.

"No, it was Baby Bullet," he said. "I am not a superstitious man, Miss Schell, but one cannot get away from the fact that some inanimate objects seem to take an active part in disposing of our destinies. I am convinced that Baby has charge of ours, and that for better or worse our fates are going to revolve about it. Now that we are all going on together, I propose one rule that every one must blindly obey."

He stopped in order to heighten the effect of what was yet to come, and gazed solemnly at the two ladies. There was a dancing light in his eyes.

"Baby is our mascot," he said, "and I think we ought to make it a rigid point of honor never to slam the little car. Let us go on the principle that whatever Baby does is right, and all for the best, however inscrutable it may seem at the time."

"An excellent rule," agreed Miss Schell. "And I second it heartily. After all, you see, if Baby hadn't floored the original young man, we shouldn't be here now, looking forward to a perfectly wonderful trip."

"We'd have still been walking," put in

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Essy. "Such a mean piffling way of getting anywhere—and you'd have spun past us in Gee Whiz little realizing what you had missed!"

"None of us would have known." The pathos of the might-have-been vibrated in Sutphen's voice. He was speaking in play, but there was an undercurrent of deeper feeling. It had been a near thing indeed; and as he looked across the table into Essy's face he felt a strange excitement at the possibilities that lay before them both. What might not happen in those six weeks to come! It stirred him with a vague sense of danger, recklessness, and delight. Her gaiety, her tantalizing beauty, her frank, winning, and engaging manner—all was sweeping him into an unknown country that he hardly dared to name.

"By Gad," he said at last, "joking apart and all that, I really believe Baby is the bubble of destiny!"

CHAPTER X

"JACK her up a little more, Alphonse."

Chee-jillup. Chee-jillup. Chee-jillup.

"How's that, monsieur?"

"Hold on—here she comes—where's that cotter-pin?"

Alphonse took it from his lips, and passed it to Sutphen, who was lying full length under the car, engaged in taking up the internal hub brake.

"Loosen her a bit, monsieur; she's binding."

"How's that now?"

"Good."

Both men were in overalls, and no one from their appearance could have told which was owner nor which *mécanicien*. They worked together in a partnership that knew of no such distinctions—quietly and intently—going over the car thoroughly, and attending to all those little adjustments that have to be made in the course of a long tour.

Sutphen wriggled his way out.

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"Alphonse?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I noticed a little lost motion in the steer yesterday, and when we get that right it might be a good idea to look into the gear case."

"Did ze second speed jump out of mesh again?"

"Yes, twice; when I changed on that long hill."

"Perhaps you overshot ze notch?"

"Well, let's look at it, anyway, and make sure."

There are few human relations more ambiguous than those of master and chauffeur. In the early days of automobiling the chauffeur was frankly the friend, the confidant, and the mentor. The trials of that pioneer period dissolved all social barriers. One might as well have tried to maintain them on a raft in mid-ocean. But as machines improved, the position of the chauffeur correspondingly declined. This proud being, once the monarch of all he surveyed, has step by step descended until now he may be occasionally seen in the ignominy of a livery. He who was once the comrade of the great is fast sinking to the level of the coachman. The new cars, with their long-wheel

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bases, are steadily widening the distance between the driver and his passengers; and glass screens have been introduced, besides, to emphasize his menial condition and dull his ears to the conversation he was formerly privileged to hear, and (in many cases) to lead. In vain he began to call himself a *mécanicien*, as though a mere name was capable of saving him; in vain he spread the fiction that he was a reduced gentleman whom reverses had brought to the steering-wheel and the spark-advancer; in vain he rolled up those monumental bills at the garage in the faint hope of attracting attention to his wrongs. His brief hour of glory is now behind him, and the sun of his triumph has set.

Mortimer Sutphen had given a great deal of thought to this vexed question, and had decided to stick to the old way. It seemed to him not only kinder, more American, but distinctly better policy to make a friend of his chauffeur rather than a servant. For this reason he always preferred to employ Frenchmen, who seemed better able to tread this middle path than any other race. The French are inherently well-bred and tactful, and (if we may say it) can be familiar without familiarity. Bocher, as a matter of fact, was a man of considerable education.

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He had passed the very severe examinations required of a *pharmacien* or druggist, and had been in a very good way of business in his native city of Orleans until he had gone automobile mad. His almost insane love of the new sport had wrecked his affairs, and had thrown him out into the world without a penny to follow the hobby that was dearer to him than comfort or competence. Regrets never troubled him, nor the thought of lost opportunities. Rigidly honest, sober, conscientious, and competent in the highest degree, he was the ideal of everything a *mécanicien* should be. As an employee he had only one defect—that he would not remain with any owner who fell behind in the automobile procession. If with the new year there was no new car—it was good-by Bocher! The wealth of the Indies would not keep him on the seat of last year's model. Give him the best and the latest, or accept his resignation!

To tax the brains of a Bocher with such an obsolete old rattletrap as the Despardoux was like asking a chronometer maker to tinker the village pump. But sooner or later there comes into every man's life a woman who can ask him to do anything. To Bocher this was Christine Schell. Yes, the admission has to be made

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sooner or later—and where better than right here? A pair of steel-blue eyes were boring holes through a heart that until now had been as phosphor-bronze. After forty years of complete insulation Bocher was at last short-circuiting under the influence of love. At what precise moment the trouble began it is impossible to state. Bocher did not know that himself. A word, a glance, the touch of a soft hand—and the harm was done. He was in love with Miss Schell—hopelessly, irretrievably, uncompromisingly in love. Small wonder, therefore, that he flung himself at Baby Bullet with the ardor of a knight of old battling with lions for the honor of his lady-love. The task may change from century to century, but the will remains the same. Indeed, in some ways, the knight of old probably had an easier job. At any rate he did not have to lie under the lion, and do his work in the dark. He did not have to crank the lion. The lion had no spark-timer, nor planetary gears, nor defective valve-stems. The lion was a going concern, which was more than anybody could say of Baby Bullet.

The next morning, as the two ladies sailed into the dining-room for breakfast—late, of

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course, but charmingly fresh and neat and dainty, and with a little air of pleasure and anticipation that enhanced their clean shirt-waists—they were struck by the haggard expression of Sutphen and Alphonse, who were already seated, and waiting for them at a little table. A question elicited the fact that they had been at work on Baby since daylight.

“The dear little car!” exclaimed Miss Schell effusively, who was so happy that a railway wreck or a gas explosion would not have shattered her equanimity at that moment. “And what is the silly little trouble?”

“Oh, nozing to speak of,” returned Alphonse.

“Everything’s froze—that’s all,” grimly added Sutphen.

Miss Schell had very pretty teeth, and they showed like two rows of pearls when she laughed.

“What delicious names! Dogs, and collars, and freezing! But it’s all right now, isn’t it?”

“Ye-s-s-s,” said Alphonse.

“I hope so!” Sutphen covertly showed his hands to Essy. The nails were black and torn, and the palms blistered. Three hours’ struggle with Baby had not been accomplished without

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some wear and tear. Essy mutely offered him her sympathy.

"I could hardly sleep for thinking I was going to drive it myself to-day!" cried Miss Schell. "All night I had dreams of its chunking along, and I steering and throttling and tooting just as Mr. Bocher showed me!"

"Ran all right, did it?" Miss Schell's enthusiasm was an endless entertainment to Sutphen, who was always ready to draw her out.

"Never missed a spark," said Miss Schell, who was beginning to acquire some of the gasoline language.

"I guess that's where it will always do its best work—in dreams!"

Miss Schell was hurt at the innuendo.

"Mr. Bocher believes in Baby," she remarked cuttingly. "Mr. Bocher told me yesterday that he wasn't going to rest a minute till it ran like a watch!"

"Well, he hasn't!" interjected Sutphen.

"Hasn't what?"

"Rested!"

Bocher hastened to relieve the situation by reaffirming his belief in Baby Bullet. He put a tremendous zip into it, with a Gallic wealth

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of gesticulation and oratory. He confidently staked his professional reputation on Baby's ultimate vindication. His eyes flashed as he waved away all objections. Any stranger listening to him might think that he was describing the car of the future. Sitting in the glow of Miss Schell's approval, and undeterred by the stifled laughter of the two others, who could neither of them resist the temptation, he gradually reached the point of declaring that "Baby in its class, *entendez-vous*—in its class, mar-r-r-r-k me—is the most perfect, satisfactory, thoroughgoing, and enduring little car ever put upon the market!"

Miss Schell always wore a rapt look when listening to the praise of Baby Bullet—a sort of soft and tender far-away expression as pure and ethereal as that of a Madonna of Murillo's. Under the spell of that automobile troubadour, Alphonse, her soul seemed to break its fetters, and soar into the azure like a bird. There was a noticeable bump as she dropped back to earth again, and took up the interrupted processes of nourishment. The lovelight melted from her eyes, and she chipped an egg with a return to her usual staid and businesslike manner.

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Breakfast continued without any further intrusion of Baby Bullet. Certain prosaic lunch questions had to be settled, of the cold chicken or veal-and-ham pie order. Sutphen had converted his golf-stick-and-umbrella-basket into a very neat ice-chest, having divided it into compartments lined with zinc, and putting in a tap to carry off the melted water. What with his tea-basket and this portable cold storage, Gee Whiz could be made very independent of roadside hospitality. The head waiter was called into the discussion, and sowed discord in what had been a happy party by volunteering two cold lobsters. Miss Schell instantly foresaw ptomaine poisoning and a death of agony. Essy and Sutphen fought for the lobsters on the ground that life is one long risk, anyway, and that the head waiter looked so much like Henry Ward Beecher that his word might safely be taken. Alphonse neutrally ate bacon, and tried to keep out of trouble. After an animated wrangle the pro-lobsters won, Miss Schell disassociating herself of all responsibility as to what might happen, and submitting gracefully to be overruled.

Sutphen showed to great advantage as a host. With him one had the comfortable feeling that

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money had ceased to exist. He kept all such considerations in the background, and there was something royal in his simplicity and assurance. It seemed quite natural that everybody should run at his nod, and spread out invisible carpets before him. That was what they were there for. Ready-made devotion rose up on every side. He called it into being by a single careless glance. Always simple, unaffected, kind, and good-natured, he yet had the air that servants, with their keen intuition, at once recognized and appreciated. He had been so long accustomed to wealth that he had lost all thought of it—an enviable attitude of mind that is rare among rich men, who are usually afflicted with an almost abnormal dollar sense.

After breakfast he managed to inveigle Essy away from Miss Schell, and lighting a cigar, persuaded her to stroll with him about the big garden in the rear of the inn. It was a beautiful morning, deliciously fresh and warm, with the dew just drying on the close-cropped turf. It was a morning to invite confidences, and cement friendships already half begun. Essy, bare-headed and with her arm through Sutphen's, silently breathed in the fragrance of new-mown hay that was wafted across the hawthorn

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hedges, and was content for a moment just to live.

"Miss Lockhart, I have brought you out here to have a very confidential talk."

"Confidential—?" She looked up at him in surprise. The smile on his strong, homely, pleasant face reassured her.

"Well, go ahead," she said.

"It's—it's Baby Bullet!" Sutphen made the admission guiltily. "Our friend, Miss Schell, seems almost fanatically attached to it."

"Hasn't any other thought in her head."

Sutphen sighed.

"There are times when I could wring Alphonse's neck," he remarked. "Of course anybody can see that he wants to make a good impression, but when he goes on puffing Baby and piling lie on lie, I wonder the earth doesn't open and swallow him up. The truth is, Miss Lockhart—and you won't think I'm a brute to say it, will you?—but that little car is rotten!"

He was relieved in Essy's acquiescence. She mournfully agreed with him.

"We just have to face up to that," she said.

"Miss Schell is a most estimable woman," he continued; "immensely likable—and all that—and what she knows of the sixteenth century

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would put a college professor to the blush—but in this Baby business she's stark, staring mad!"

"Monomania," assented Essy drearily.

"Alphonse and I pulled it all to pieces this morning, and hoisted out the engine on a tree; and after three terrific hours and the help of a bucket of coal-oil we managed to get it to turn over. It will actually run now, and develop a little power, but Heaven only knows how long it will manage to keep it up. It looks as though our whole trip will reduce itself to a baffling and persistent struggle to keep Baby on the move."

"With no time for anything else."

"Well, not much!"

"It isn't any good to talk to me about it," said Essy. "You ought to have it out with Miss Schell."

"But she's capable of flaring up, and throwing the whole thing over."

"I know she is. In fact, she is sure to do it. She talks about Baby Bullet in her sleep." Essy's helplessness and discouragement betrayed itself in her voice. "You're convinced that it will never stand up and run?"

"Absolutely."

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"Then you had better call it off and leave us to our fate."

"I won't do that, whatever happens. There's a solution for every difficulty."

"But you can't put in six weeks towing Baby?"

"You bet I could—if you think Miss Schell would submit to it!"

"Submit?"

"Well—agree."

"She never would."

"I've been turning over several ways of meeting the trouble. We might arrange to have Baby stolen."

"You forget that we have Mr. Bocher against us too!"

"Confound him—yes. But what about an accident? Topple it into a ditch, or have it run into by a steam-roller!"

"It would be just like Baby to bust the steam-roller—and, besides, Christine would know in a minute. Then, even if she didn't, she might tie us up for weeks until it was mended again."

Sutphen bowed his head to these unanswerable criticisms.

"What's the matter with storing it somewhere?"

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"She'd want to be stored with it! No, Mr. Sutphen, I hate to say it, because it is all too silly for words—but no Baby, no us!"

She smiled sadly as she delivered this ultimatum.

"And why do you care to bother?" she added. "If I were you, I'd whip up Gee Whiz, and disappear into space."

Sutphen chewed the end of his cigar enigmatically.

"Oh, that's out of the question," he said. "I'd rather push Baby Bullet than lose you. But what we want is a working compromise. I suppose that means towing. Well—let's tow!"

"There's no other way that I can see—and even that will need tact—all the tact you have, and probably more!"

"We've settled one great point, anyway. Whatever happens, you and I are friends, aren't we? We're going to see this through and stand in together."

They shook hands on it.

"You're splendid the way you stick at things," she said approvingly. "You're an awful lot of a man, and I've marked you up ten on my affection gage."

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"I'm going to go higher than that before I've done!"

"Well, don't break it," she returned.

"I'm afraid the other fellow did that."

"There wasn't anybody else—I was only fibbing. I'd have felt mortified not to have a broken heart to offset yours, you know!"

"Honest?"

"Why, you just drove me to it!"

Sutphen did not say anything as he took the path back to the inn, but Essy became alive to the fact that his cheerfulness had suddenly doubled. He kept looking down at her and smiling. She was smiling, too, and she felt within her a wild and unaccountable pleasure. The old garden, the timbered and bulging inn, the grass, the flowers, the fleecy clouds passing overhead—all merged together in an unforgettable picture. Life had somehow become transfigured, glorified, more than ever precious and desirable. Sutphen stopped, and opened the glass door for her to pass into the dining-room.

"You don't know how happy you've made me," he said quite simply.



Life had somehow become transfigured, glorified.

CHAPTER XI

It proved less difficult than Sutphen had supposed—to break the news of the tow to Miss Schell, and prepare her, so to speak, for the rope. Her face fell a little, and there was a moment of hesitation. Alphonse got very busy with cotton-waste, and bobbed out of the firing-line lest he might be called into the fray and be made to take sides.

“But it seems so silly to tow when it’s working beautifully,” protested Miss Schell. “What’s the good of its having an engine at all if it’s never to be used?”

“This is how I feel about it, Miss Schell,” said Sutphen, “and I’m sure you’ll end by agreeing with me: it’s awfully important for us to get to Wye as fast as we can, and without any delay or breakdowns. The consul’s telegram will be waiting for us, and it’s quite on the cards that it may need to be answered.”

“Yes, remember that,” put in Essy.

“We don’t want to have the old chaperon lady arriving with nobody to meet her. She

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might turn round, and light out for home." Sutphen could be very persuasive when he tried, and his grave, kind, big-brother manner was very disarming. Miss Schell leaned back against Baby Bullet, and listened to him with judicial calm.

"Can't see it," she said. "Mr. Bocher has just been telling me that Baby is in tip-top shape. I don't want to be towed, and can't see why I should. Where's Mr. Bocher?"

At this question, repeated in a heightened tone, a black mop of hair rose above a mud-guard, and disclosed a furtive French countenance.

"Did mademoiselle call?"

"Did you not tell me just now, Mr. Bocher, that Baby Bullet was running splendidly, and developing all of twenty-two horse-power?"

The Frenchman dodged his master's astounded gaze, and blinkingly sustained Miss Schell.

"But mademoiselle will remember my saying also that ze unknown quantity in all gas-engines is luck. I never presumed to provide that commodity for Baby Bullet!"

"I don't see why Baby shouldn't have as much luck as Gee Whiz," retorted Miss Schell.

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"Indeed, the fact of it having broken down so much is almost like a safeguard against the future!"

At this apparent deadlock Sutphen suddenly had an inspiration hardly short of genius.

"The truth is that Gee Whiz has been acting very queerly of late. Every car develops trouble sooner or later, and twice yesterday I thought I was stuck!"

It was now Alphonse's turn to look astounded. His mouth opened in amazement. Fortunately, Miss Schell's face was turned toward Sutphen, and she missed the blank stupefaction of her devoted *mécanicien*.

"That being so," continued Sutphen glibly, "it seems to me only like common prudence to carry Baby Bullet in reserve, so to speak. We might need that tow the other way round, you see. It would make me feel lots safer to know that there was Baby all ready and willing to pull us at any time out of a tight place!"

The effect of this plea on Miss Schell was instantaneous. The possibility of Baby Bullet extending reciprocal courtesies to its lordly brother, and perhaps even coming to its rescue, relieved the whole tow situation from any appearance of humiliation. Her jealous belliger-

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ency vanished. She was no longer a lioness fighting for her cub, but the sweetest and most reasonable of women, graciously making concessions to good comradeship. The fact that Gee Whiz also was liable to aches and pains brought about in her heart a complete revulsion of sentiment. Alphonse, delighted at the chance of making himself solid with both sides, hastened to throw in some bewildering technicalities that seemed to settle the matter.

Amid the resulting good humor Miss Schell climbed into her seat, and, with Alphonse beside her, had the supreme gratification of driving Baby on the low gear out into the street. This was vindication number two, for in that whole twelve yards Baby never missed an explosion and only whizzled slightly when she applied the emergency brake against the power, and successfully killed the engine in front of the hotel. Excitement was becoming to Miss Schell, and as she sat there, glowing and smiling with the color mantling her thin cheeks, she recalled something of the delicate prettiness of her distant youth. Alphonse eyed her with undisguised admiration, and ventured to whisper a compliment in her ear.

"Mademoiselle grows younger every day,"

he said, "but not more charming, for zat would be impossible."

In reply she called him "Mr. Man," and told him not to be silly. But she was not ill-pleased, nevertheless, and her good opinion of "Mr. Man," already high, went up several more points. She was altogether in an excellent humor when the ropes were made fast, and the pair in front called back to know if she were ready. Miss Schell uttered a little scream of assent; uttered several more at a spotted hound that made a half-hearted attempt to get in the way; then more still at a bold child who flung himself on Spotty, and withdrew him from the competition; and then, assuming her road expression, which would have done justice to a locomotive engineer passing through a prairie fire, Miss Schell earnestly settled herself for the toils and perils of the day.

In front they took touring more easily, and once past the town the big car almost ran itself. They had no need to hurry, for Wye was but forty miles beyond, and it mattered very little as to when they got there. The engine ran very silently, the exhaust was next to noiseless, and save for the beelike humming of the coil, there was little to distract them. If

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ever automobile conditions were favorable for conversation it was in Gee Whiz that morning, but both Sutphen and Essy were slow to begin. They both felt a singular diffidence at being alone together. They had reached a stage of acquaintance that at a word might pass into something very different. They were shy—shy of each other. Of course the big American was not altogether silent. He gave voice to the usual inanities. "Was she comfortable? Pity it was so dusty, wasn't it? Wouldn't they be better off without the rug?" Essy pointed out an occasional picturesque cottage, or some noble country-house overgrown with ivy. They talked about everything except that which was closest to their hearts, though their eyes often met in the slow and lingering glance of those who are asking each other the old, old question.

"I don't wonder you're such a successful man," she observed suddenly, with a little laugh of recollection. "How could it have occurred to you?"

"What? I don't understand."

"Telling Christine that you wanted to hold Baby Bullet in reserve! The audacity of it took my breath away. And she was so delighted, poor thing—so complimented!"

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"A fellow does rise to the occasion now and then—but Heaven only knows how we are to keep it up, Miss Lockhart. That's the only thing about our trip that worries me. It's bound to come to a show-down some time or other."

"Poor old Gee Whiz!" she exclaimed. "What a sight it will be for gods and angels when we get Baby between the shafts."

"Oh, I'm going to do it. Miss Schell really doesn't mind being towed, but her pride's at stake, you know. The great idea is to invent enough troubles for Gee Whiz to keep her in a good humor, and balance up with Baby."

"It would be rather a joke on you if it really happened, you know!"

"Well, nobody can say it mightn't. I shouldn't be altogether sorry, if it wasn't a fracture, or anything important."

"It's more Mr. Bocher's fault than anybody's. I'm at a loss to make the man out. Why should he be at such pains to tell those awful fibs about Baby Bullet? If it wasn't for Mr. Bocher I don't believe we'd have a speck of trouble."

"Neither do I."

"What's the matter with him, anyway?"

"Can't you guess?"

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"Oh, but that would be too absurd—a chauffeur, you know. Her father was a Major in the Regular Army."

"I am not at all inclined to think it is absurd. Everybody has to love somebody, you know. And, after all, he's a druggist, and that in France implies a very thorough scientific education."

"But look at him!"

"I might say, look at her!"

"Wouldn't it be too extraordinary——!"

"Let's help it along, Miss Lockhart. Love and let love, you know. He is a tremendously worthy sort of chap, and this is the first time I've ever seen him bat an eye in the direction of a petticoat."

"I don't like it," said Essy decisively. "It's cheapening—cheapening for me, you know. The thought of it makes me feel hot and uncomfortable."

"My dear young lady," exclaimed Sutphen, "I doubt if your friend is so happy out there in California teaching her little school, and reading up the sixteenth century in the lonely evenings."

"But a chauffeur!"

Sutphen looked at her rather queerly.

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"I'm a self-made man myself," he said. "My father was one of the plain people—worked with his hands—and brought his wages home on Saturday nights. It is not for me to talk about drawing these fine lines."

Essy had a little pang of shame as she perceived how much this revelation had cost her companion.

"We all go back to shirt-sleeves somewhere," he added. "Only some do it sooner than others—that's all."

"Or forget quicker—which is what I do, I suppose."

This was her plea for forgiveness, and was accompanied by so disarming a look that Sutphen felt himself smiling.

"It's only a fool who interferes in such things, but that's no reason why we shouldn't give them the open track." He was referring back to Alphonse and Miss Schell, and indicated them by a movement of his head. "If there's one thing I'm proud of, it's being a man of sentiment. I'd walk a mile any day to help a love-affair along."

"My idea of men of sentiment is that they usually put in their mile on their own affairs."

"Oh, I suppose we do that too," he an-

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swered. "But I always come out strong on the side of true love every time—mine, or anybody's, you know. When I wander about the wharves—I hope you are as fond of wharves and ships as I am—it often occurs to me that the animating principle behind all the yards and masts, behind the hoisting out of cargo and the hoisting in, behind all the puffing of donkey-engines, the bustling about of tugs, and the whole sweat and noise and uproar of the thing—the animating principle, I say, is the unseen mother and children who have really called it into being. That's what it all comes down to, really, after all."

"Yes, I suppose it does," said Essy. "Though for the completeness of your beautiful picture it is a pity about the bachelors."

"They are all heading in the same direction. Every frowsy cabin-boy there has a sweetheart. I was on a long yachting cruise once, and the most noticeable thing about our crew—all of them deep-water sailors, and the real thing, you know—was the interminable letter-writing that beguiled their leisure hours. They kept up a brisk correspondence from the most impossible places, and couldn't have been any keener than the rest of us for their mail. The steward told

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me once—and he probably knew—that it was a rarity to see a man's name on any of their letters."

"You don't know how reassuring that all is," said Essy. "It makes one feel that things are really better than they look. I'd hate to see love going out of fashion like a last year's bonnet."

"You needn't worry," he returned. "Like the poor, it is always with us."

It is remarkable how much can be said about love when two people, of opposite sexes, get started on that absorbing theme. Time took wings and flew. A prolonged tooting from Baby obtruded the fact that it was one o'clock and time for lunch. Sutphen looked at the dashboard clock with amazement, and pulled up, reproaching Essy as he did so for having been so interesting.

"The morning's actually gone!" he exclaimed. "I'm sure it's not my fault—it must be yours."

His appetite, however, had not suffered through the abrupt disappearance of the morning. He was as impatient as anybody for the kettle to boil under the elm where Alphonse had made their little camp. These open-air lunches

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were always an unfailing pleasure to them all. The silverware, the pretty china, the spotless napkins that Alphonse, in some mysterious manner, invariably managed to produce, were all laid out temptingly on a strip of white canvas. Essy said it reminded her of the Arabian Nights, and made her feel like the Princess Chaza-maza-something pulling the check-string for the genie to stop and hand out a magic repast. Alphonse, indeed, made a very fair genie in this respect, though Sutphen, as the Beautiful Prince, deprecated his own performance as the only rôle that was indifferently filled. It seemed out of keeping that the Beautiful Prince should have his pockets rattling with spark-plugs, pliers, copper terminals, a voltometer, and assorted wire! But, as Sutphen remarked, even a Beautiful Prince has to keep up with the times. They were always as happy and care-free as children, and gathered no less eagerly about their table when Alphonse called them to their places.

The outskirts of Wye were made somewhere toward three o'clock. Owing to Miss Schell's repeated solicitations, Baby Bullet was cast loose, and was permitted, not a little to Sutphen's perturbation, to enter the town under

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its own power. The poor lady shrank from the ignominy of trailing in behind Gee Whiz, and welcomed this brief respite from toying with an almost childish gratitude. Had Baby been alive she could not have been more tender of its feelings. She had as lively a sense of Baby's personal mortification as though it were a lame and backward child she was attempting to screen from a jeering world. Her whole body would quiver when the inevitable small boy would yell out the inevitable cry: "Git-a-horse!"

It was with the elation of a Roman heading for a triumphal arch that she led the advance into Wye. The two cars made a brave procession choo-chooing in tandem down the main street to the post-office, where the unusual sight quickly assembled a crowd of riffraff. Nowhere may it be better said that the extremes meet. Motors and loafers make as sure a circuit as the positive and negative wires of an electric battery. Sutphen jumped out, pushed his way through the throng, and soon reappeared waving a telegram in his hand.

"It's all right!" he cried cheerfully. "She's coming on the next train. The consul put it through just as I hoped!"

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There was a scramble for the telegram. Miss Schell got it first, and then with a smile of satisfaction handed it to Essy. The nebulous and trying period of non-chaperonage was about to expire. This is what Essy read: "Mortimer Sutphen, care of Post-Office, Wye. Mrs. Johnson arrives 4.15 first-class London Express. Please meet. Hamlin."

There was a hurried discussion as to the next step. It lacked forty minutes of the train's arrival. Sutphen was rather inclined to send the ladies to the hotel, and take upon himself the sole responsibility of meeting the old lady; but he gave way before their storm of protest. They all wanted to meet the old lady. Even Alphonse betrayed an unconcealed desire to be present at the great event. So the cars were started again, and a friendly infant was taken aboard Gee Whiz to guide them to the railway-station close by.

Out on the long platform the telegram was read and reread in the hope that it might shed some light on the personality of the newcomer. Sutphen's dread was that she might prove a whining old lady who had seen better days. Miss Schell's bugaboo was an aged conversationalist. Essy announced that she had a "con-

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viction " that Mrs. Johnson would prove a beautiful, mild-eyed, motherly old thing, who would worry about their getting their feet damp, and make them all love her. She drew a picture of the old lady haunting the dull London office for the letter that never came—at thus suddenly finding herself among friends, and able to earn a comfortable salary instead of walking the London streets, and looking longingly and hungrily into the bakers' windows. She followed her on her forlorn daily visit to the consulate. "No letter yet?" she timidly asked, and was about to turn away to hide the tears, etc., as the consul said: "Hold on a minute, Mrs. Johnson; here's something that may interest you!"

Sutphen helped out the pathos with appropriate suggestions, including a mortgage on the farm, and a blind daughter. Every misfortune was heaped on the old lady's head in order to heighten the dramatic moment when succor came. They all grew quite sentimental and chummy over the good they were doing. Miss Schell remarked that it was fine to help people without impairing their self-respect. The old lady wouldn't feel the sting of charity, nor incur the pauper taint. Sutphen hastened to

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agree that it was a straight business proposition—so much chaperonage for so much money—and that he couldn't imagine a more dignified nor becoming situation for an elderly lady in narrow circumstances. He foresaw that they would all get very much attached to Mrs. Johnson. Indeed, they had all made a pretty good beginning in that direction when the station-master came out and serenely rang the brass bell to announce the express. A little later it announced itself, with a distant rumbling that soon deepened into a very respectable roar—and a little later still it burst upon them with thunder and glory, and slowed down with a sharp hiss of its air-brakes.

There was the usual moment of confusion; of porters running; of compartment doors opening; of baggage-trucks careering with the spirit of cavalry cutting up a fleeing enemy. Sutphen's little party bunched together, their eyes following the first-class compartments. Of a sudden the door of one of them was seen to open. A lady descended—a dashing blonde lady of perhaps thirty-five, with peroxide hair, an enameled face, and a knowing, self-confident, aggressive look. She wore the hues of the

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butterfly, and dangled with chains; and her voice, as she raised it loudly for assistance, rang out shrill, piercing, and nasal. Our little party cast a panicky look at the other first-class carriages. These disgorged only one other passenger for Wye—a glossy clerical dignitary with a singularly flat hat.

“I guess this is our old lady,” murmured Sutphen, indicating the resplendent blonde. “Say, don’t you think we’d better run?”

But their instant of indecision was fatal. The jingling female had already fixed them with her glance, and had made flight impossible. She flew toward them with smiles and gurgles of recognition, and seizing Sutphen’s hand addressed him with a scream.

“Of course you are Mr. Sutphen! How do you do, Mr. Sutphen? And these are the ladies I am to gooseberry? I knew you were the right outfit the moment I peeked through the window. Amurikans, says I—gentleman and two ladies, that’s right. Yes, I am Mrs. Johnson — Loretta Johnson — and when the counsel said, ‘automobile,’ I give a whoop, and said ‘me for the buzz-wagon’ — But you must present me to your friends—I know it won’t be long before they are mine too—just girls

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together, you know, and all out for a good time!"

For once in his life Sutphen was nonplused. He would have thanked the railway company if the platform had opened and swallowed him up. Then pulling himself together, he stammered out: "Miss Schell, Miss Lockhart—Mrs. Johnson!"

Alphonse, who had been operating all the penny-in-the-slot machines in the faint hope of finding one defective, now appeared unobtrusively on the scene. At the sight of Loretta Johnson he nearly fell over.

"Thirty thousand pigs!" he exclaimed helplessly. "Thirty thousand pigs! And so zis is our old lady!"

CHAPTER XII

IF the first sight of Mrs. Johnson had been a shock, her continued presence served only to unfold fresh horrors. On the way to the hotel she put them in possession of her life-history, which incidentally included three divorces. Her last was from Mr. Brander Johnson—"the famous football trainer." The court had given him "the child." The age and sex of this interesting infant was left in obscurity. It was always impersonally referred to as "the child." Another side-light on Mrs. Johnson's character, which she artlessly let out on the way to the hotel, was that her small income was dependent on her remaining abroad. "Brander don't care," she observed, "but his folks are tony and highly connected, and they shied at my going into vawdeville. Shucks, I only did it for a bluff. No one-night stands for me. But it's kinder hard to see the steamers leaving, and feel stuck over here for life. That's how I happened to see the counsel—just blew in to find somebody to talk to—I always do that

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traveling even if it's only a Vice—and I hit your telegram first thing! ”

With all her chatter there was something formidable and dangerous about the woman. Her pale, restless eyes were as busy as her tongue, and allowed nothing to escape her. Cheap adventuress was stamped all over her. She was of the kind that bobs up after a rich man's death, and threatens a scandal if she is not bought off. As like as not she has a forged common-law marriage contract to show, and (as a class) has successfully found the way of adding a new terror to death. Hysterical, high-strung, and usually addicted to some drug, such women are more to be feared than the most unscrupulous man. Actuated not only by self-interest, but often by pique or malice, they stand ready to make the most infamous accusations on the spur of the moment, and are capable of carrying them off with unlimited noise and perjury. Sutphen felt himself turning cold all over as he received the headlong advances of this painted creature, and realized the box he had got himself into.

Miss Schell and Essy, more innocent than he of the seamy side of life, merely put her down as “odious” and “impossible.” Even

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these adjectives were somewhat mitigated by the entertainment they found in the woman, whose rampant folly and egotism was not without its humorous side. At the council of war they held later, Sutphen was surprised at their submission to circumstances. He was eager to give Mrs. Johnson what he slangily called the G. B.—the grand bounce—and proposed that no time be lost in accomplishing it.

“Oh, let’s try to stand her for a few days,” said Miss Schell, “and then we’ll think up some nice good reason, and quietly get rid of her.”

“It’s too insulting to send her right back,” agreed Essy. “We haven’t any right to mortify her like that after having sent for her!”

“But I sent for an old lady,” roared Sutphen like a wounded bull. “I particularly specified an old lady—not the Diamond Queen of the Bowery!”

His outburst was received with dejected laughter. There was a hideous humor in the situation. Propriety, demanding a chaperon, had been fobbed off with a lady who was flamboyantly in need of the article for herself. They had called for an old lady—and had raised this vivid and enameled apparition. It was all Essy and Miss Schell could do to re-

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strain their host from making short work of her. It is one of the penalties of generous and sensitive natures that they endow others with similar qualities. They both shrank from inflicting on this brazen female a rebuff that would have passed as lightly over her as water off a duck's back. There was a little cowardice besides in their toleration of this unexpected incubus—the Diamond Queen as Sutphen had named her—and a few white lies, together with some days of her enforced society, seemed preferable to an open and tempestuous rupture.

“Well, it's for you to choose,” said Sutphen doggedly, “only for Heaven's sake, I hope you'll absolve me from any blame in the matter. I brought on this trouble, and I'm prepared to get rid of it—single-handed!”

“No, let's temporize for two or three days,” said Miss Schell, “and then we'll pretend that bad news has made it necessary to break up the trip.”

“And I'll spot about, and find a nice old lady to take her place,” volunteered Essy. “We were idiots ever to have sent to London—we'll chase up a clergyman, and see the goods this time before they are delivered!”

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"My own idea is that she's a bunco-steerer's pigeon," said Sutphen, moodily continuing his own trend of thought. "A decoy, you know, and all that, and it's worth remembering not to leave things about!"

This was a most unfortunate remark. Its consequences were far-reaching. It induced Miss Schell to retire behind a curtain, and reappear with a packet in her hand.

"I wish you would keep this, Mr. Sutphen," she said. "It's our letter of credit, together with some English notes and gold. It will be safer with you till we get rid of her."

Sutphen carelessly stuck the packet in his pocket, and remarked that it was just as well to be careful.

"We don't know what we are up against," he added, and made another plea for sharp and instant action. But he was again overruled, and bidden to be patient and wait.

An agonizing dinner followed. Sutphen described it afterward as one unending scream. Loretta's tongue never stopped, and her banter and innuendoes not only made her company gasp, but attracted the astonished attention of the other diners. She regaled the whole room with snatches of her remarkable autobiography

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in a voice that penetrated to the street. Beginning with her marriage to Mr. St. Clair, amid scenes of unparalleled elegance and luxury, she whisked her hearers lightly through intervening episodes of domestic unhappiness till she again took heart with number two. "Mr. St. Clair insisted on keeping the child, but I said No, Siree, if you want the child you can pay for the child. He give me fifteen hundred down, and his note for two thousand. Dishonored, of course! That was the kind of man Mr. St. Clair was! Never could collect a penny on it. Bargain price, wasn't it? But that was always the way with me—fooled every time, and played for a sucker.

"Some day I'll go back and injunct him. But I didn't care then, for Mr. Spielmann fairly idolized me. They always do that at first, you know, and we poor silly things believe that it's going to last. Spielmann was a dandy-looking feller—dark, with them big melting Jew eyes and a taking way with him. In the theater business, a box any time I wanted it. Used to think I was the happiest woman on earth till I'd see Mr. St. Clair toting around the child. It always rubbed me up the wrong way to be reminded of how I'd been cinched.

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But I got even by having him wrote up in *Town Talk*—some that was gospel true, and a lot that I just guessed at. It hurt him considerable, and when he shot the editor, there was quite a scandal in the Territory. That was about the time that me and Spielmann had reached the hair-pulling stage. I went to Dakota and had nervous prostration. He followed, wanting the child. No, not that one, but his own, you know. Sneaked it while I was being massadged. If it hadn't been for Mr. Johnson's sympathy I guess I'd have just laid down and died. He wasn't much of a looker, but my, as long as he'd hold my hand and pay the bills I was as satisfied as though he was a Romeo. I don't know as I didn't like him the best of the bunch. He was one of them brainy kind, and talked like a book. That was before he went into football. He was a promoter then, and I used to hold up the other end of it to British investors—the social side, you know—while Mr. Johnson he did the skinning!"

In this awful manner the dinner proceeded from course to course till the concluding moment of coffee. At the other tables there were sounds of smothered merriment. People choked

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and spluttered into their napkins. An old gentleman, sitting stolidly by himself, grew redder and redder, till finally he rose and stumbled out of the room in a paroxysm. Little side remarks on "Americans" reached Sutphen's abnormally acute ears. Loretta was not only disgracing his party, but was putting a slur upon his country. There was not an Englishman there who would not treasure up this evening against the great Republic. Sutphen flushed under the concentrated stare of those amused and supercilious faces. They probably took him for Mr. Johnson's successor. Essy and Miss Schell also felt themselves roasting in the common disapprobation. They all got out of the dining-room with the enthusiasm of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, their hurried retreat followed by a faint but audible titter.

They made an unusually early start the next day in order to avoid a repetition of this ordeal at breakfast. The Diamond Queen was in the highest spirits, and so kittenish and saucy that an increasing depression stole over the whole party. When the time came to tie up Baby Bullet to Gee Whiz, and some explanation had evidently to be made, Sutphen, who was to do

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the explaining, experienced a certain dryness of the throat as he went about the task.

"Gee, but that's too bad!" exclaimed Mrs. Johnson. "So the little car is busted, is it?"

"Oh, no, it's in first-class condition," said Sutphen—for the benefit of Miss Schell, who was standing beside him. "Only, you see—it's to have it in reserve, you know—in reserve—to help us out if the big one was to go wrong!"

Loretta did not know anything of motoring, but even her untutored intelligence balked at so extraordinary an arrangement.

"But what's the matter with them both running, and then towing the one that goes dotty first?"

"The slight tendency of a Despardoux to overheat—" began Sutphen.

"We've fixed it up this way," interrupted Miss Schell belligerently, "and surely you'll credit us with knowing our own business better than a stranger. The mature opinion of experts like Mr. Sutphen and Mr. Bocher of course is hardly worth considering in comparison with your own——!"

"What a peppery little person it is!" exclaimed Loretta good-naturedly, pinching Miss

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Schell's cheek. "I don't know their heads from their tails. So never mind, and cut it out. Only, if it is all the same to everybody I'd rather not be put in Buster!"

This uncomplimentary reference to Baby Bullet stung Miss Schell in the tenderest place. Heaven knows what she might not have said had it not been for Sutphen, who was quick to make a diversion by hustling Loretta into the tonneau of the big car. Miss Schell, pale with anger, and uneasily conscious that there was some degree of truth in Mrs. Johnson's offhand criticism, allowed Alphonse to assist her into Baby Bullet. Here, thanks to the suavity and adroitness of the Frenchman, she was gradually wheedled into a better frame of mind. But the subject rankled, however, and she returned to it more than once with a morbid pertinacity that taxed Alphonse's invention to the utmost.

The day was as beautiful as the one before, but the jarring note of Loretta's presence spoiled it utterly. At the little midday camp the gaiety was forced and unnatural. Sutphen was fighting down an exasperation that it was all he could do to master. A whole morning of Mrs. Johnson had left him sullen and sav-

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age. Essy was frankly dispirited, Miss Schell's face assumed a Red Indian expression, or rather lack of expression, that concealed a burning volcano within. Alphonse, sensitive as always to the general sentiment, went about his duties with a dismal, hangdog air very much at variance with his usual smiling cheerfulness. It remained with Loretta—the irrepressible Loretta—to keep alive the holiday spirit. This she did with a go and vivacity that flattened out her companions like a steam-roller. Her incessant chatter, her loud shattering laugh, her irritating affectations, her gross and palpable effort to flatter and fawn her way into their good graces—were all as benumbing as the wind off an iceberg. Becoming conscious of a lack of response, Mrs. Johnson redoubled her efforts, and obliterated the last traces of pleasure that any of them might have found in the day, the occasion, or the company.

Then they got aboard again with the depression of Tolstoi's prisoners on the road to Siberia. Loretta's inexhaustible flow of conversation continued unabated. Having now narrated the whole history of her life "from the time she could talk" (Sutphen and Essy exchanged glances at the appropriateness of the

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term) Loretta developed a new means of torment in the line of asking questions. She calmly proceeded to follow up Sutphen from the same interesting period of infancy, and turned him inside out. At first he tried to evade her questions, but finding that his refusal was likely to be at Essy's expense, he bowed his head to the inevitable, and called his imagination to his aid. It was the only weapon he had, and it did him good service. It was a mild and somewhat nervous amusement, thus to throw dust in the eyes of his insatiable inquisitor, but it served to brighten his dreary lot, and bring an occasional smile to Essy's despondent face.

But if misery rode in the first car, a smaller and more engaging supernumerary had an invisible seat on Baby. A union of souls was in progress on the tow, and while the Gee Whizzes thought the day would never end, the Baby Bullets were taking the hours at a racing clip. Two, in their case, was not only company, but had rapidly approached something nearer and dearer. The mischief had begun by Miss Schell reading Alphonse's future in his palm—a future that five minutes afterward embraced Miss Schell's as well, for—! It is not for us to look too deeply into the working of those

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middle-aged hearts, nor to impart a secret that the prudent novelist keeps till the end of his book! We shall not ask why Baby Bullet made that fearful swerve, nor why Miss Schell, blushing like the peony, cried out: "No, Alphonse—one's enough!" Let us simply make a note of it, and pass on.

CHAPTER XIII

It was Crandonbridge that sheltered them that fateful evening—or, to be more specific, a dark, damp, cutthroaty old inn, called the Inskip Arms Commercial Hotel. The prolonged society of Loretta Johnson had by this time so thoroughly fagged out Essy and Sutphen that even the prospect of soap and water had lost its charm. A listlessness had settled on them both which Sutphen compared to the sleep that overtakes the Arctic traveler in the snow. They knew they ought to rouse themselves, but were powerless to do so. Sutphen sat for an hour in front of the inn, sunk in the apathy of despair. He chewed the end of an unlit cigar, and wondered how he could manage to grind through another day of that dreadful woman. He lacked the decision to get up and cut the Gordian knot. Miss Schell's displeasure loomed so large at that moment, and he remembered her insisting on "two or three days." Well, he would see to it that it wasn't a second over two, anyway. He should

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see, too, that Miss Schell got her proper share of Loretta's company. Perhaps by dividing her they might lessen their individual misery. By rights, Miss Schell ought to take her for the whole day, but then, of course, Miss Schell wouldn't. Catch her, indeed! And he had been left without a moment to talk alone with Essy. That was the most galling part of it all. Not even a whisper edgewise. And to make matters worse he must have appeared surly and ungracious. He had even spoken sharply to her—to Essy—when she had playfully advanced the spark-lever to make the engine pound—quite sharply, and she had evidently been hurt. Altogether, it had been a most unfortunate day, with a lot of back-firing. He had distinctly lost ground. That was plain. Lost a lot of ground. Queered himself, maybe, for all time.

There was only one thing to be said of the Inskip Arms Commercial Hotel—that it was empty. There were no adjoining diners to snap up the pearls that fell from Loretta's lips—only a sardonic cold roast, some jaded fruit tarts, and a shuffling old waiter. There was a strange glitter in Loretta's eyes as she took her place. It seemed to go with her walk, which was slightly unsteady, not to speak of an almost startling

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merriment. Her chatter was now interspersed with wild bursts of laughter, and a very real red began to show under her rouged cheeks. The secret came out, when she rapped boldly on the table; and ordered the waiter to bring her a Scotch and soda.

"My, but I wouldn't take five dollars for my thirst," she said confidentially to Miss Schell. "Why don't he order wine instead of leaving it to us to give him a hint?" The "he," in this case, was Sutphen, who was stonily drinking tea, and wondering what on earth he should do if Loretta's exhilaration went much further. She was already tipsy, and there was a rich promise of worse to follow. It followed sure enough. She had a second Scotch and soda, and then a third. She grew noisier and more incoherent with every gulp. A terrible friendliness began to assert itself.

"Call me Loretta," she said, lurching affectionately over on Miss Schell. "I want everybody to call me Loretta except the chafer. That wouldn't be right for him, of course, though Bowcher's a real little genelman—I'm not saying he's not a real little genelman—but them class distinctions have to be kep' up, though if he has a mind to he may call me Mrs. J.—

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but after now I want to be Loretta to everybody else. Don't pull such a face over it, Christine—Loretta won't choke you to say it. Loretta—there you are—easy as falling off a log. And she, too, sitting over there like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth—yes, you, Essy. Cheer up, chicken, and for the Lord's sake, don't look that glum and miserable. It ain't a bit becoming, nor perlite either."

So she maundered on, to the horror of all present, stubbornly refusing to be talked down or ignored. She was just tipsy enough to be absolutely intolerable—at the buttonholing, confidential, endlessly explanatory stage, when the tongue trips lightly over difficult words, and the eyes grow glassy and fixed; at the stage when the subject insists on being the center of attention, and commands it by a heightened voice, strident interruptions, and outbursts of spluttering laughter. In police court language it is mildly described as "somewhat excited with liquor." It is the midway between "sober as a judge, your Honor," and "drunk and incapable." Before the dinner was half done, Essy timidly excused herself on the plea of a headache, and slipped away to bed—but not without the penalty of a whiski-

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fied kiss at leaving. Miss Schell squirmed uneasily in her chair, as though she, too, was meditating escape; but Sutphen signaled to her peremptorily to remain, and then astonished her by his composure and apparent lack of perception. He seemed quite unconscious that anything was amiss, and exerted himself to keep Loretta in a good humor by a surprising deference and respect. Inwardly, of course, he was boiling, but he was too much a man of the world, and had seen too much of the vagaries of drunken people, to risk a scene with Loretta in her present condition. He was turning over in his mind a Napoleonic solution of their difficulties that it needed but a little patience to accomplish.

This solution required the cooperation of Miss Schell, and that was why he held her with a significant glance and a whispered "Don't go," as she more than once threatened to break away. After dinner he proposed that they should take their coffee in the inn garden, and any question of Loretta's ability to get there was put at rest by his offering her his arm. He steered her to a seat, where, fortunately, it occurred to her to sing, and thus gave him a moment aside with Miss Schell.

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"Be packed and ready to leave at two," he said, "and meanwhile stand by and see that she gets safe to bed!"

She pressed for an explanation, but he simply repeated these directions, and added that he would attend to everything else himself.

Lest the cool, out-of-door air should prove too sobering, Loretta hinted somewhat broadly for a *pousse-café* by rapping on the table. Sutphen readily seconded the idea, and made no objection to the waiter leaving the cognac decanter on the little iron table. He was not sorry to see that Mrs. Johnson made good use of it, and noticed that she slyly refilled her glass several times. It was a pretty dull evening, but Sutphen consoled himself with the hope that it would probably be their last—together. This cheering thought incited him to control his resentment and continue to play the rôle of amiable host. Even when Loretta began to reach the quarrelsome stage, and betrayed a tendency to take offense at almost anything anybody said, he energetically poured oil on the troubled waters, and more than once dragged Miss Schell from imminent destruction.

But at last the end came as Loretta com-

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menced to yawn. It was as welcome to Sutphen as the sound of angels' harps.

"You are tired," he said hypocritically.

In the starlight he saw her hand feeling for his. He adroitly eluded this terrifying mark of approbation, and loudly jingled the money in his pocket. One complication was quite enough for one evening without the intrusion of another. He rose, saying it was high time they all went to bed. Loretta staggered to her feet, and steadied herself against Miss Schell, grasping her with both arms like a lamp-post.

"It is the night air," she explained weakly. "Always affects me—the night air—a kind of wooziness like it took you in the limbs."

"I feel it too," said Sutphen blandly. "A touch of malaria, probably. These damp old gardens are the deuce!"

But Loretta, with surprising powers of recovery, managed to let go Miss Schell and stand alone. She made a very creditable attempt to walk, and gained the house without mishap. Here, at the stairs, they all said good night, and with the help of the banister rail Loretta successfully triumphed over a fresh spell of "woozy," that for the moment

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threatened to make her further progress impossible. Sutphen, with a breath of relief, saw her disappear into the darkness above, and felt that the hardest part of the night's work was done.

There still remained the arrangements for their two-in-the-morning flitting; but these, with the stalwart assistance of Alphonse, did not keep him much longer out of bed. The bill was paid; some explanations were offered to the landlord (made easier by the fact that the moon was full, and the circumstances thus warranted so early a departure) and a lavish tipping of the boots and hostler did the rest. Having laid the train, and turned over the command to the faithful *mécanicien*, Sutphen felt free to seek a few hours of well-deserved repose. He went to his room, undressed, and laying his watch, wallet, and change under his pillow, soon fell into a fitful slumber.

He awoke to find Alphonse standing over him and shaking him by the shoulder. He was so drowsy that this process had to be repeated several times before he sat up and gradually recovered some degree of comprehension. He was blind with sleep, and so stupid and clumsy in getting dressed that he buttoned the

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wrong buttons, and had a long irritating search for his tie, which at last he found hanging from the loop at the back of his shirt. Alphonse had gone off to tap at the ladies' door, and carry a little roll of their belongings down to the cars, which, from precaution, had been drawn up a hundred yards or so beyond the inn door. Sutphen was soon beside them, carrying his dressing-case in his hand, and wondering between his yawns as to what he had left behind him in his room. Some extra sense was worrying him with uncomfortable reminders.

"You'd be sorry to lose your hair-brush," said the sixth sense.

"But I put it in," retorted Sutphen sleepily. "I'm sure I put it in!"

"Well, what about your sponge?"

"In too," said Sutphen. "I distinctly remember laying it between my pajamas, and thinking what a fool I was to do it!"

Alas, for the interruption of two feminine voices that knocked out this stock-taking just as the sixth sense was getting "warmer and warmer." Essy and Miss Schell stole up like two conspirators, and greeted their host with a whisper of recognition.

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"Did you try her door?" he asked darkly.

"There wasn't a sound," returned Miss Schell. "I listened for a good minute at the keyhole to make sure it was all right."

"She's what men call dead to the world," said Essy, with a smothered laugh. "Just think of her waking up and finding us gone!"

"We aren't gone yet," remarked Sutphen anxiously. "I sha'n't breathe till we're actually started."

Alphonse was fumbling at the tail lamp of Gee Whiz, and was fretting them all by his slowness. He hardly took a minute to get it lighted, but it seemed like an hour. Then there was another heart-breaking delay over a flat tire. It was pumped up while every one waited in suspense to know if it were a puncture, or merely one of those unaccountable leaks that occur somehow without any apparent reason when a car has been long standing. Fortunately, it seemed to be the latter, and the tire swelled out under Alphonse's steady strokes. It was a solemn rite, and was accompanied with unspoken wishes that were almost prayers. They all bent over, listening for a tiny hiss. There wasn't any tiny hiss. The tire stood up like a Trojan. Alphonse tightened the inner

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valve, put on the cap and cover, and pronounced the automobilists' amen: "Air-tight!"

Luck was indeed with them. It seemed a happy augury that Gee Whiz took the spark at the throw of the switch, and turned over like a steamer. They all got aboard, Alphonse himself taking the tiller of Baby Bullet, as they meant to make speed, and for this nerve and skill were required at the helm. Miss Schell could be trusted at a pottering eight miles an hour, but the present program called for the fastest time that could be made. Nothing was to interfere with their putting all possible space between themselves and Loretta Johnson. When that marooned lady awoke they had to be far to sea, and over the horizon.

The moon shone brightly; the roads were empty of all traffic; and the powerful gas-lamps shot a dazzling arc of light three hundred feet before them. All the conditions were favorable, and it was with an exultant feeling of freedom and escape that Sutphen speeded up and gave Gee Whiz her head. They rolled swiftly through Crandonbridge, faster through its outskirts, and once beyond in the open country the great car flew on uncurbed and un-

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checked. Essy was nearly blown off her seat, and finally sank on the floor to get the protection of the dash. She would have liked to close her eyes, but the fascination and terror of that awful whirl through the air seemed to make this a feat too dangerous to attempt. It was as though her safety was dependent on keeping as close a watch on the road as Sutphen himself, who, bent double over his wheel, gave it the unblinking attention of a man who carried all their lives in his hand.

The big car hardly seemed to feel the drag of Baby Bullet. Several times Essy looked behind to see if the latter was still there, and was surprised and relieved to perceive it tearing through the gloom behind them. No wagon was ever more literally hitched to a star. No Despardoux, even in the wildest imagination of the catalogue-writer, has ever before or since attained the velocity of Baby during the climax of that lightning flight from Crandonbridge. At times it appeared as though its wheels left the ground altogether—as though it had parted company with the earth, and was simply soaring through space like some extraordinary flying-machine. It screamed from every part of its astonished and complicated mechanism,

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groaning and grinding and wheezing and whizzling in a passionate attempt to express its displeasure with the whole business. Miss Schell waited with her heart in her mouth for it to fly into a million fragments and cast her dismembered body into the neighboring fields. But she was as passive as a person falling off the Matterhorn, and she experienced a similar powerlessness in making any audible complaint. Besides, to distract Alphonse's attention almost invited the disaster she feared. She could do nothing but moan and pray, and occasionally snatch a moment to congratulate herself on being still alive.

Not being bound for anywhere in particular, they did not have to bother about sign-posts or maps. All roads were the right roads to them, so long as they left Crandonbridge and Loretta Johnson. Had daylight found them in Wales or Norfolk, they would have been equally pleased. As a matter of fact it was Yorkshire that claimed their attention as dawn broke, though they did not know it till they stopped at a farmhouse and begged a sleepy woman for some milk.

When the time came to pay, Sutphen confidently put his hand in his pocket, and drew

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out—nothing! He felt in his other pockets, while his face grew longer and longer.

“Haven’t you any change?” said Essy, who was surprised to see him upset by so trifling a matter. “Get some from the others!”

“Do you know what I have done?” he said, lowering his eyes, and looking uncommonly foolish. “I’ve left my wallet and every penny we have in the world under my pillow at Crandonbridge!”

CHAPTER XIV

PEOPLE often refer humorously to the "cold gray dawn of the morning after"—but with our little party, though the dawn was there all right, the humor was unaccountably missing. They drew together, and in breathless voices faced the appalling catastrophe. What were they to do? To go back meant Loretta, and to go forward with a capital of one pound nineteen shillings and fourpence—all the ready money that could be scraped together—was clearly to attempt the impossible. It was Saturday, too, with a very black Sunday looming ominously ahead—Saturday, with banks shutting at one, and Sunday, with no banks at all!

Sutphen rose manfully to the occasion. He took it all on his own shoulders, and made light of the tragedy. He even said it was an awfully good joke, and that they would all laugh about it afterward. He dispelled Miss Schell's fears about her letter of credit. Even if it were lost or stolen nobody could use it. Besides, whatever happened, he was responsible

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for it, and she was not to have the faintest uneasiness on that score. The point was, what were they to do *now*—in the meanwhile—and he laid the matter before them for discussion. Or at least he said he did, though in fact he did most of the talking, and all of the contradicting. Miss Schell and Essy could see nothing for it but returning to Crandonbridge and brazening it out. It was terrible—of course it was terrible—but what else was to become of them with less than ten dollars for a six weeks' automobile trip?

Alphonse volunteered to sneak back to Crandonbridge, recover the money, and then rejoin them at the farmhouse. At first this plan struck them all rather favorably, but on reflection, Sutphen put his foot down and vetoed it.

"It's too likely to slip up somewhere. If the landlord is dishonest he may have made away with it; if he is honest he will turn it over to Loretta; and besides these contingencies, how do we know he won't make difficulties about handing it over to Alphonse?"

"You can give him a written order for it," said Miss Schell.

"No, we can't take the risk of a throw-down. That woman is diabolically clever, and she'll

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exert every nerve to get the whip-hand of us. Trust her to tie up Gee Whiz and get Alphonse arrested!"

"But there's no other way out of it!" pleaded Miss Schell.

"Oh, yes, there is. People with a ten-thousand-dollar automobile can't very well die of starvation, and then I have oodles of money in the bank in London. Benjy Bardeen and I have a joint credit there of five or six thousand pounds. Benjy's my chum, you know, and we meant to make the whole trip together till he got side-tracked by a street-railway proposition."

The immensity of this sum warmed their drooping spirits. It was indeed silly to worry when such affluence lay ready to their hands. Sutphen's calm and assurance had, after all, some foundation. The two scared women took courage. Miss Schell forgot her letter of credit. Essy smiled wanly. Perhaps Sutphen was right in saying that it was a capital joke. In the light of thirty thousand dollars his laughter was not unjustified.

"We're all right!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "We'll run on to the next good-sized town and go into pawn at the best hotel. It may be rich

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in historic associations—who knows?—and one pound nineteen shillings and fourpence is ample for the little extras you can't get charged! I'll telegraph to the bank for a couple of hundred pounds, and back to Crandonbridge to tell them to send up my watch and purse to Benjy Bardeen at the Cecil. This will leave Loretta without any clue and put everything right! "

This seemed such a simple solution of their difficulties that they all began to wonder why they had ever been so perturbed. Miss Schell so far recovered her composure as to start a fresh worry. She wanted to know about the chaperon end of it? Sutphen said that he was sorry, but you couldn't manage everything on one pound nineteen shillings and fourpence—and proposed that the chaperon should stand over till they were more in funds. Miss Schell had to acquiesce—there wasn't very much else to do, anyway—and satisfied her conscience by a few Cassandra-like observations on their probable social doom. This concession having been made to the proprieties—on the touch-wood principle—she drank another glass of milk, and looked very much relieved.

Then they cranked up, and proceeded on their way in excellent spirits. The wide bar-

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ren moors that stretched away in every direction to the encircling horizon seemed to shame, in their billowing vastness, the hot haste of the night before. How was any Loretta to find them now? They derided the fears that had impelled them to such a breakneck speed, and trundled along at an easy pace, secure and happy in the consciousness that they had made good their escape. At nine o'clock they stopped at a little hamlet for breakfast, and Sutphen sent off his two telegrams—one to the Anglo-Patagonian Bank, and the other to the landlord at Crandonbridge. The bank was told to reply, *poste-restante*, to Eccles, a fair-sized town some eighteen miles farther north, in order that they might learn exactly when to expect the money. Sutphen stipulated that a special messenger be sent with it, so that they might avoid the inevitable delay that would otherwise occur in the mail. He didn't see any reason, he said, why they should be kept waiting beyond Sunday morning, and even talked lightly of luck and Saturday night.

The breakfast cost four and ninepence, the telegram two shillings and eightpence halfpenny, the farmhouse milk fourpence. This left them with one pound eleven shillings and

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sixpence halfpenny—or a little over eight dollars. The ice-basket, providentially, had been well stocked before leaving Crandonbridge, so their little hoard did not need to be drawn upon for lunch. This meal, as usual, they took by the wayside, under the shade of a rick of hay. Eccles was so near that they decided to rest in camp for the whole afternoon, in order to give the bank a chance to answer their telegram. They were all a little nervous about going into pawn, and though Sutphen tried to appear bold and self-confident, he privately admitted to Essy that he would feel safer with that telegram in his pocket.

“It’s the moral effect of it,” he said. “It’s all very well to bluff, but it’s still better to hold the cards. There’s no sense in feeling uncomfortable when you don’t have to.”

“Besides, it’s nicer here,” she agreed.

There was no doubt about that part of it. It was a glorious day, and too good a one to lose in a stuffy hotel. On that wide moorland they seemed to have the world to themselves, and were loath to exchange it for the bustle and constraint that awaited them in Eccles. The outspread rugs, the pillows, the books and papers and tea things—all served to make their

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little camp attractive and homelike. There was a beauty and a sort of pathos in the thought of these gipsy resting-places—these fleeting hearths—which were found only to be lost. Intimacy never grows so fast as under the open sky. Love has naturally an instinct for the out-of-doors! While Gee Whiz and Baby Bullet roasted in the sun, their erstwhile passengers sprawled comfortably in their gorsy nest, and carried on those soft confidential and interminable conversations that seem in all climes the preliminaries of mating. Essy and Mortimer Sutphen were still in that delicious period before any fateful words are said. They were each trying to hide from the other the complete truth, and often with so much success that pique, heartaches, and misunderstandings arose in abundant measure to keep the course of true love on its time-honored path. With Alphonse and Miss Schell, however, an understanding had been more quickly reached, and very practical considerations were being faced in the coo-coo of their love-birding.

Murmured Cock Robin:

“Ah, ma belle, could I but secure the New York agency of the Pattosien skid-proof tire, we should ask ourselves no longer zees ques-

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tions that so distract and agitate. Is it not ze strangeness of fate zat I should have their letter in my pocket offering me this unrivaled opportunity for twelve thousand francs! ”

“ But the twelve thousand francs, Alphonse? ”

“ Mr. Sutphen he will put me in ze way of zem. We will make interest with Miss Essy when ze time comes. Believe me, in zeir happiness zey will refuse us nozing.”

“ But it is a lot of money, and——”

“ Listen, my beautiful—suppose I was the great commercial, and he the *mécanicien*. Reverse ze things, and what we should do, you and I, when asked in that triumphant moment for ze means of joining two other hearts no less loving and devoted—but lacking only twelve thousand francs to accept an agency zat on ze face of it is what you Americans call—a snap? Do! I call ze honest fellow to my arms. Do I not know zat with such a tire he can repay me within three months! Voila, it is done, and all are happy! The Pattosien skid-proof tire with a medal of gold wherever exhibited! ”

It was in the cool of the afternoon when they ran into Eccles and stopped at the post-office. It was a gray, rather forbidding town, though

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this impression probably sprang from the suspense and anxiety that cast a cloud over their entry. As Sutphen remarked, it looked like a spot-cash population, who were unlikely to give or receive financial quarter. Now that their fate was to be so soon decided an uncomfortable excitement held them in a grip, and though they all tried to put a brave face on it, their hearts beat a little quickly as they realized their eight-dollar-and-alone-in-the-world condition.

Through a window in the post-office Essy saw Sutphen receive a telegram. She passed on the good news to Miss Schell, who, with Alphonse, was behind in Baby Bullet. But she did not attempt to pass on Sutphen's blank and stupefied expression as he tore it open, and then came toward her with a look of acute distress.

"A most extraordinary thing," he said. "I don't know what to make of it. By Jove, little girl, we're in a fix!"

Essy took the telegram and read it:

"No funds in bank. Bardeen closed out joint account yesterday. Inquiry at Cecil Hotel elicited fact that he will not be back till Monday night, address meanwhile unknown. Manager Anglo-Patagonian."

There ensued a curbstone consultation. Miss

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Schell burst into tears. Essy turned very pale. Sutphen was painstakingly jolly and unconcerned, and he had a dozen explanations for Benjy Bardeen's unaccountable action. But his face had rather a set look, and his elaborate cheerfulness screened a vexed and angry heart. He asked the way to the White Hart Inn, and grimly proceeded there amid a procession of riffraff and small boys.

"Rooms?"

The landlord's smile was as warming as spring sunshine. He was a rosy, thick-set, effusive individual, with a hearty and encouraging manner. It seemed almost a crime to impose on such honest worth, and excite such capers of welcome on credit.

"We can suit you very nicely, sir, if you can give us 'arf a minute to turn round. One double-bedded room and two singles, very good, sir. The fack is, Sir John Stiles, M. P., is just giving up 'is—that's 'is motor-car in the court, sir. Sir John Stiles, Lady Stiles, Master Algernon Augustus Stiles—on their way to the Dook's at Duffle Castle. Same size party as yours, sir, and he hexpressed 'imself very pleased with the haccommodation. *If* the ladies would not mind waiting a few minutes in the

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droring-room, *or* perhaps a little bite of—no? William, show these ladies to the droring-room, and tell Molly to turn over the beds the minute Sir John gets out. Only a few minutes, ladies—*just* a little patience—we are always full on market-day—yes, madam—you're most kind, madam—I find that always it is people of position who most readily make hallowances——!"

Alphonse went out to take the cars into the courtyard, while the others followed William up-stairs and drearily drew together in a corner of the vast empty drawing-room. It was a dark, horsehairy place with a sort of abandon-hope atmosphere that seemed suitable for people that had no money, and who were going indefinitely into pawn. The pictures—large, black-framed steel engravings—were lugubriously to match—the death of Nelson, the burial of Sir John Moore, and one representing a drowned female floating limply on the surface of a heaving ocean. As in duty bound, they tried to console one another, and affect a cheerfulness they were very far from feeling. Sutphen told a funny story about Benjy Bardeen, bringing out the latter's impulsive, hot-headed, and reckless character. The story fell quite

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flat. It even added another note of alarm. Benjy, as described by Sutphen, seemed an uncommonly poor rock to trust to. Miss Schell asked some pointed questions as to Benjy's uprightness, honor, etc. Sutphen was in the act of indignantly repudiating her implied suspicion, when they were all suddenly startled by an immense uproar in the courtyard below.

They rushed to the window, and looked down on a seething, yelling mob. Carts and men and dogs and automobiles were all inextricably jumbled together in a bewildering and mad confusion. In the center, rolling on the ground, were two frenzied human figures, grappling and clinching and pounding at each other in furious combat. Above the clamor were heard shouts and cries of encouragement: "Go it, Frenchy!" "Hit him again, Bill!" "Bite off his blooming ear!" "Give him beans, old chaw-bacon!" "Where's the police?" "Perlice! Perlice!"

One of the figures tore himself free, rose, and displayed the scratched, bleeding, and infuriated countenance of Alphonse Taliefferro Bocher! Even as he did so his foe caught him by the legs and toppled him over, and again they went at it hammer and tongs, Alphonse this time

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on top, and pounding his opponent's head on the cobblestones as though he were using it handily to tack down a carpet. There were renewed shouts of "Murder," "Perlice," and even "Fire!" Miss Schell fell to the floor, screaming and sobbing. Sutphen bounded down-stairs, and shoved his way through the crowd, making a path by an unstinted use of his powerful shoulders. Alas, it was only to face two minions of the law, who followed at his heels with drawn clubs.

The tack-hammering came to an untimely end. Alphonse was jerked up by his collar, dribbling blood and explanations. Mr. Bill, a mis-shapen, crimson-faced farmer, was likewise assisted to rise. He, too, had a story to tell. Everybody talked at once, including the police. It seemed that Bill had backed his cart into Gee Whiz, and had scored a deep scratch in the beautiful finish of the aluminum frame. There was the scratch for the whole world to see. Bill said it was Alphonse's fault for not calling out. Alphonse demanded the skies to witness that he had not only called out, but that Bill had deliberately turned round in order to make a good job of it, using at the same time an opprobrious term that reflected seriously on his

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(Alphonse's) mother. The police impartially arrested them both, and began to slowly bore their way through the crowd to the station-house. Sutphen followed that melancholy procession, being joined on his way thither by the landlord, not to speak of about a hundred others—all eager to see the conclusion of the fray.

The police inspector made short work of the matter: ten pounds' bail in each case and a hearing set for Tuesday morning. At first he said Monday, and then remembered that that was a bank holiday. Bill produced a friend who went on his bond. Sutphen, with a bold front, proposed to do the same for Alphonse. The police inspector demurred, and inclined toward cash. He was very polite, accepted Sutphen's assurances with respect, thought a while—and then wanted ten pounds. In the desperation of despair, Sutphen assumed the high horse; talked about the intervention of the American Ambassador; protested vigorously that the value of his car alone was an overwhelming security; warned the inspector against raising an international question; and made the ten pounds appear a matter of principle, for which he was prepared to die in the last ditch.

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The inspector deferentially listened to it all; explained, with the soft answer that turneth away wrath, that his own discretion was limited, and that the ten pounds was in no way to be considered a slight, but merely an unavoidable formality.

Finding it impossible to carry his point, Sutphen turned with a fine air to the burly landlord of the White Hart Inn, and said that no doubt "his good friend here" would oblige him by signing the bond. His good friend, on the contrary, betrayed an extreme reluctance to do anything of the kind. Like all hotel people he had a preternatural instinct for imposture. He had been bitten too many times not to see through a bluff. He answered a little bluntly that he did not see his way—that was his horrid formula—that he did not see his way (as though it were dark, and he had left his lantern at home)—to go bail for a perfect stranger.

Then the murder came out.

"The truth is, I'm temporarily out of funds," answered Sutphen. "An absurd chain of accidents has landed me here penniless. I must really throw myself on your good nature, and ask as a favor—yes, a favor—that my unfortunate chauffeur be spared the hardship of

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two days' imprisonment while my money is on the way."

The landlord grinned sardonically. He had been nearly fooled, and he congratulated himself on his escape. Beggars in motor-cars—that was the way of it nowadays! The police inspector also shed a considerable amount of his geniality. In fact, he pretty well shed it all. At Eccles, as at most places, "if you haven't no money you needn't come around." He felt he owed it to himself to make up for his misplaced courtesy. In a curt and businesslike manner he waved Alphonse to a cell, and shook his head at Sutphen's last appeal.

It was an affecting leave-taking between master and *mécanicien*. The latter was in tears, and asserted his innocence between his sobs. What weighed on him was not the prospect of a British dungeon, but the terrible predicament in which he had unwittingly involved those he loved. He might have been another Dreyfus on the eve of departure for Devil's Island. Sutphen was bluer than blue, but he told the faithful fellow to buck up, and promised that no stone should be left unturned to free him at once. In that fateful and melting moment Alphonse saw the opportunity to bring forward

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the agency of the Pattosien skid-proof tire. He hastily explained in French, while an impatient policeman was waiting to drag him away, the sentimental and financial difficulties that Monsieur Sutphen might so readily resolve. "Monsieur is acquainted with the incomparable nature of the Pattosien, and as a man of affairs can readily see the insignificance of the sum demanded. Yet without monsieur's assistance I shall be obliged to lose, not only an assured income, but what is dearer to me than all—the life companionship of one I love to madness!"

Sutphen asked a few questions; was shown the letter; and then came plump out with a hearty consent.

"You write and accept it," he said, "and name me as your backer. It's a first-class proposition and can't fail. I wish you all luck, both with the tire and the lady!"

Alphonse was overcome at his good fortune. He tried to stammer forth his thanks. Contrition, the Pattosien tire, his gratitude, all were touched on in the broken sentences with which he proclaimed himself the happiest of men. The astonished officials beheld their prisoner beaming with satisfaction, and apparently ready

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to dance with joy. It seemed almost a slight to the jail that he should accept its hospitality in such unbounded high spirits. They left him sitting on the cot in his cell, whistling.

The irony of the contrast struck Sutphen as he nodded to the inspector and gloomily marched out. How gladly would he have borrowed a handful of those twelve thousand francs! Had he been alone it would have mattered very little. But Essy and Miss Schell? What was to become of them? He foresaw difficulty with the landlord of the White Hart—humiliations, insults, contumely. It went hard with him, too, to leave poor Alphonse languishing in prison. He felt profoundly sore and miserable. Everything had gone wrong, and there was probably worse to follow.

“Oh, Benjy, Benjy Bardeen!”

Altogether it was in a very dejected frame of mind that he returned to the White Hart Inn.

CHAPTER XV

SUTPHEN's forebodings were promptly realized. He found the two women pale and tearful, to whom the news of Alphonse's incarceration came as the last straw. Miss Schell keeled over on the sofa and began to kick hysterically. She moaned out something about "the prison taint," and how "he could never hold up his head again!" Sutphen was goaded into saying "Oh, bosh!" Essy passionately reproached him for being so unfeeling, and then, conscience-stricken at what she had said, began to cry too. It was at this damp moment that William appeared, no longer the bland, brisk, obsequious William—but the avenging head waiter of an outraged hotel. He came to inform them, in chill and terrible accents, that there were no rooms available for their accommodation.

"But we were told there were," roared Sutphen. "Sir John Somebody's rooms. They were to be ready by now!"

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"Very sorry, sir," said William. "It was all the fault of the young person at the desk—a most unfortunate misunderstanding—and you had better try the Blue Boar or the Temperance Hotel!"

There was no good kicking against the pricks. The White Hart had ordered them out into the cold, cold street. The only dignified thing to do was to leave as quickly as possible. Besides, it was now dusk, and time pressed. Sutphen did not waste words with William. He infused his two guests with a little of his own indignation, and they all sailed out together to try the Blue Boar. But, alas, the news had preceded them. The Blue Boar eyed them askance, and proclaimed itself full. It expressed some hypocritical regrets, and passed them on to the Temperance Hotel. Here they were likewise scorned. A friendly bystander piloted them thence to Gibbs's Commercial Hotel. Sutphen did not attempt to do business at the desk. He withdrew Mr. Gibbs to one side, and frankly and eloquently explained the entire situation. He also appealed to his charity and manhood, and drew a moving picture of two ladies in distress. Mr. Gibbs plainly wobbled. He was a dissipated youngish man with a horseshoe pin.

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He said it was probably all right, but he'd have to speak to his mother. Sutphen wrung his hand, and reluctantly saw him retire into an inner office. A very different Gibbs emerged—a suspicious, cynical, you-can't-try-this-on-me Gibbs. The eloquence and the handshake had both been wasted. He indicated the cold, cold street, and had not even the grace to make a suggestion.

“We don't do that kind of business,” he said.

They slunk out-of-doors again, and took counsel on the sidewalk. There was only one thing left to do, and that was to pawn Gee Whiz. Sutphen had noticed a bicycle repair shop where the word “Automobiles” in large letters had caught his eye. They now directed themselves thither, and after a little difficulty ferreted out the proprietor. He was brought over, wiping his mouth, from a public house near by.

Sutphen broached the question—twenty pounds till Tuesday, and ten pounds more for the accommodation—a security with first-class sixty horse French car worth two thousand pounds.

“How do I know it's honest come by?”

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said Mr. Tate, scratching his head. "It mayn't be your car at all!"

This was a blow, indeed. Sutphen explained that he had left the receipted bill, together with his purse, watch, and change, under his pillow at Crandonbridge. It seemed good policy to take Mr. Tate into their confidence.

"Then why don't you go back and get it?" remarked Mr. Tate. "Are you trying to tell me that you actually ran away from your own money? Pardon the liberty, sir, but it seems to me your story don't hold water!"

Sutphen desperately went on to tell of Loretta, and of their precipitate flight.

Mr. Tate listened in silence.

"I ain't saying it ain't true," he remarked, "but I'm a pore man—and twenty pound is twenty pound! I'm agreeable to store your car and keep it on spec till you get out of your troubles, but that's as far as I can go!"

"Well, what about five pounds?" insinuated Sutphen.

"Can't see it," returned Mr. Tate; "nor three, nor two, nor a single quid." It was beginning to steal over the creature that an attempt was being made to trick him. He

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belligerently wound up by asking if there was any green in his eye.

Sutphen did not attempt to see. They left Mr. Tate with the question unanswered.

"What was to be done?"

They stopped under a lamp-post to decide. There were never three human beings more forlorn and homeless. It was easily within their means to get shelter and food of a sort, but they had now become such conspicuous figures in Eccles that they were smarting to escape. It would be hard to live through Sunday and Monday in that terrible town, pointed at on every side, and with one of their party known to be in jail.

"We have just two alternatives," said Sutphen; "one is to crawl into some cheap little hole here and hide our diminished heads, and the other is to boldly push on to Peebles, camping out by the way, and turning our mishap into a jolly pleasant adventure."

"Oh, but Alphonse?" bleated Miss Schell. "It would surely comfort him to know that we were near. I cannot bear to think of his breaking his heart behind those iron bars."

"Alphonse is all right," said Sutphen. "He isn't breaking his heart at all. I've promised

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to set him up in business in New York, and get him the agency of the Pattosien skid-proof tire. They led him off as jolly as a clam! "

Miss Schell had to have the good news repeated. Her hand pressed Sutphen's in the dark.

"Oh, how good of you!" she cried. "You ought to have told me at once. What does anything matter now!"

Essy was mystified by the reference to the skid-proof tire, and failed to see how it in any way relieved their present difficulty. But Miss Schell's instantaneous rise of spirits was contagious. Somehow things seemed less dreadful and hopeless. It was a kind of joke after all, and even laughable if looked at in the right way. Miss Schell's bleak and tearful silence had given place to an actual hilarity, and with it Essy felt loads lifted off her own heart.

"Which is it to be?" asked Sutphen. "Cower here in penury, or push on to Peebles?"

"But won't it be just as bad at Peebles?" Essy asked.

"I'll telegraph Benjy Bardeen to have money waiting for us there!"

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"But suppose he doesn't! Suppose he has gone away?"

"Oh, that's ridiculous. The bank said he'd be back on Monday night; and once Benjy knows the fix we are in, he'll get us out of it like lightning. It probably looks far worse to you than it does to me. He's likely had to strain every nerve to secure an option on something—all the more as he didn't come over the least prepared to do any business—and he knew I had ample to carry me on a few weeks. Those London fellows are suspicious of Yankee millionaires, and he has had to put up cash, and cable home for credits. It is all as plain as day, and it is up to us to pull through Sunday and Monday as cheerfully as we can!"

"On eight dollars," ejaculated Essy.

"And there'll be a big hole in that for gasoline," added Miss Schell.

"We oughtn't to need more than eight gallons to Peebles—I mean on top of what's in the tank now, and we're well stocked in carbide, grease, and cylinder-oil."

"And if we broke down on the way?" put in Essy, whose less courageous mind was inclining for the ills they knew rather than those they did not.

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"Oh, let's chance it," said Sutphen. "Think of the fun, camping out like tramps. If Gee Whiz breaks down we'll take Baby Bullet—and if Baby goes—we'll *walk!*"

The thought of action is always stimulating. It was exhilarating to take so splendid a risk rather than the meaner certainty of grubby lodgings in Eccles. They all hated Eccles cordially, and it seemed as though they would breathe freer when once away. On their road back to the White Hart Inn, Sutphen despatched a telegram to Benjy Bardeen—an urgent, peremptory, vitriolic telegram that was calculated to rouse that remiss gentleman to an appalling sense of his own misdemeanors. To make assurance sure Sutphen also fired off a post-card in which his anger and chagrin were even more amplified. This involved an outlay of a shilling and ninepence halfpenny, which cut down the treasury to one pound ten shillings and tenpence. We can be precise on this point, as the money was anxiously counted under a flaring gaslight in the post-office, in the faint hope that a stray shilling or two might have been overlooked. Then they proceeded to the White Hart Inn—leaving on their way at the station-house a hastily scribbled note to Alphonse in-

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forming him of their decision—and attempted with as little noise as possible to yoke up and escape without notice. But hostlers and stablemen arose from all sides. The bar-door opened and emptied out a gaping and inquisitive crowd. A street full of people poured into the courtyard. All Eccles was there to mortify them, and to jeer and jibe as Miss Schell took her seat in *Baby Bullet*. Under ordinary circumstances they would scarcely have noticed these creatures, but as it was, every look seemed an insult, and their faces burned with resentment and indignation. They got out as fast as they could, and ran along to Mr. Tate's establishment to replenish their gasoline. Here they took in six gallons, and parted with nine shillings—reducing their little store to one pound one shilling and tenpence.

It was a fine, clear night as they rolled out of Eccles, and resumed the road north. Could Alphonse have been with them they would have risen superior to all their trials, and enjoyed more completely the delicious freedom that now lightened their hearts. But the thought of that faithful fellow in his cell checked their feelings of relief and joy. It seemed but right to remember his sad case, and

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be appropriately depressed. Essy asked about the skid-proof tire, and was thunderstruck to learn the truth. Christine! to marry *him*—marry *Alphonse*! It came upon her as a revelation, at once sad and humorous and astounding. She was both shocked and entertained—for it seemed awful to marry a chauffeur—besides cheapening her—Essy—in Sutphen's eyes. She was reassured, however, as she gave a shy expression to these misgivings, by his outspoken approval of the match. Chauffeur, nonsense! Alphonse was a man of education—a scientific chemist—whose craze for automobiling had led him to throw away all his chances. They had a hot little wrangle on the subject, ending in Essy impetuously confessing herself in the wrong. She insisted on stopping the car, and ran back to give Miss Schell a hug.

It was well she did so, for that poor lady was dissolved in tears, the Pattosien skid-proof tire having exhausted its power to console her. She could no longer live in a future, building castles in the air, and her heart was in that dungeon with her unfortunate Alphonse. She was wild and hysterical, and was filled with an unreasonable conviction that he would incur a

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term of penal servitude unless something were done at once—or at any rate lay the seeds of consumption and premature death. Essy soothed and comforted her; went back to ask Sutphen whether the jail had seemed *warm* and *clean*; went back a second time to make sure that Alphonse had been led away *whistling*; and altogether proved herself a sweet and tender comrade in the elder woman's distress. When at last she went back to her seat beside Sutphen and they again speeded up, she gave him all the credit of her good deeds.

"It worries me that you're so nice," she added naively. "When a man's that it shows that he has passed through so many women's hands!"

"Is that so disturbing?"

"I'd prefer to think there hadn't been any!"

He smiled, and did not answer. He was pleased to think that she was teased a little by his past. It had not been a very bad past, but, of course, like every man— It took all his self-control not to lay his big hand on hers, and bring her to the admission that his heart demanded. But he was withheld by a certain delicacy. No man can be sure of a woman till

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the word is said, and a false move on his part would put them all in an acutely false position. The situation was singular enough already without adding an additional complication. An intuition warned him that Bocher's success had made something of a rift between himself and Essy. That ridiculous affair had for the moment brought love into disrepute. In little ways Essy had grown colder and more distant—he could feel both the change and the reason for it—she was trying to disassociate herself from any sentimental relation—even the slightest—with Alphonse's master. Her pride and her sense of humor alike caused her to shrink back.

Sutphen sighed, and decided to go slow. He would stick to the big-brother attitude, and do nothing to embarrass her. As a gentleman, no other course was possible. Circumstances were forcing them both into such an intimacy that he had to be on his guard lest he might appear to be taking an undue advantage of her. There was the greater need of that invisible distance now that the conventions were so rapidly dissolving. No, it was a trying and extraordinary position for a young girl to find herself in, and he could do much to soften it. Much, in his

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case, meant the stern postponement of anything in the nature of an avowal.

He made up his mind not to stop till the moon rose, foreseeing the discomfort of groping about with lanterns, and blundering into all sorts of mishaps in the dark. It was a glorious moon, only two or three days past its full, and it burst upon them with a radiance and splendor that seemed to sweep away all the little misgivings they had been a prey to. The broad and rolling landscape, now visible for the first time, took on a friendly and inviting aspect, and no longer encompassed them with a forbidding mystery that left all to the imagination. Their hearts lightened. What was there to be afraid of? The whole adventure took on a new zest.

They stopped the cars by the roadside, and all descended. The grassy footpath, boarded by a thick hedge, offered the obvious place for a camp. The cars were maneuvered so as to form an angle, and make with the hedge the three sides of a little enclosure. The fourth, or open side, which was narrowed to a yard, was hung with a rubber lap-robe by way of a door. When the rugs were spread, the lighted lamps brought in, and the tea-basket unpacked, there was a general congratulation at the snugness

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and privacy of their new home. Having had no dinner, and ravenous with a fast that went back nine hours, they were in no mood to be critical of the dilapidated chicken and the odds and ends of ham and tongue and stale sandwiches that still remained in their larder. It was an indiscriminate meal, but welcome and satisfying, with tea to wash it down, and more hearty laughter and gaiety than any one could have thought possible under the circumstances.

Then they said good night, Sutphen taking his heavy overcoat, a pillow, and a rug, and making a little camp of his own twenty yards or so down the line. Before doing so, however, he had unclamped the horn from Gee Whiz, and had given it over to Miss Schell, who was thus provided with the means of raising an alarm should anything untoward befall. Sutphen pledged his honor that a single toot would bring him rushing to the rescue, and went away smiling at Miss Schell's complete satisfaction in this novel weapon, and at her last request that he should not forget to provide himself with his biggest and heaviest monkey-wrench.

He smoked a cigar, and then dozed off to sleep, first putting a handkerchief over his face to keep out the light of the moon. He hardly

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knew whether hours or only minutes had passed, as he suddenly returned to consciousness, and sat up in a sort of nightmarish terror. He had been dreaming of a train running over him, and awoke in a cold sweat of apprehension, which was not allayed by the strange and unfamiliar surroundings in which he discovered himself. He felt for his wrench, and withdrew into the shadow of the hedge waiting with every instinct alert for the danger to show itself. B-o-o-o! sounded the horn from the ladies' stockade. In the still night it was immensely loud and ominous, and just as Sutphen rose to his feet the further sound of a man running struck disconcertingly on his ears. B-o-o-o, b-o-o-o, b-o-o-o! rang out the horn again, and clatter, clatter, clatter came the advancing feet in a heavy jog-trot. Sutphen sprang into the road, and advanced swiftly, wrench in hand, prepared to deal out death and destruction to the foe. The latter could now be dimly discerned, a solitary figure, head down, elbows bent, sprinting forward in the middle of the highway. Sutphen tried to call out, but his voice was drowned in the incessant bull-like roaring of the horn. The figure drew ever nearer. It was a man. Gee whillikins, it was Alphonse!

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Sutphen shouted the good news through the wheels of Baby Bullet. There was a moment of wild and enthusiastic greeting, the poor panting fellow throwing his arms around his master, and patting him on the back, French fashion. Sutphen patted back, eluding a large fat kiss that went astray in the dark. The ladies emerged with screams of joy. A happy family was reunited. There was a hurly-burly of questions—of handshakes—of hugs. Alphonse was led into the stockade and made to sit down.

“Now, tell us all about it,” said Sutphen.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHEN I read your note," began Alphonse, fondly regarding his lady-love, "I gave way to despair, running my head against ze door till comes a policeman who ses: 'Stop it, you crazy fool!' He said it was bad for the paint, the cochon, not to speak of annoying everybody. I apologized with my tongue in my cheek. He did me good, zat fellow—it was like Mr. Sutphen's cold bath—I recall my pride, my nationality, my hero-father of '70. I set my teeth, and said: 'Nevaire mind, nevaire mind,' sitting on my little stool, and thinking, well, it wouldn't be for ver' long. What's two and a half days in ze life of a man? Nozing. But I was miserable, just the same, terrible miserable and down at the heart.

"After ages had passed I heard noises outside, talk, excitement. I said joyfully to myself it is Monsieur Sutphen with the ten pounds. My door was unlocked, but instead of Monsieur Sutphen it was an Englishman with a red face—stout, important gentleman, with the manner

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of an autocrat. Everybody bowed before him, and it was all: 'Yes, Sir John; no, Sir John; quite so, Sir John'—as he pointed at me with one finger, very high and mighty, and says: 'Is zis ze man?' Everybody fell over everybody to assure him that I *was* ze man. Zen it all came out. He was ze Sir John Stiles at the inn, whose rooms we were to take, and his automobile was stuck on ze street. He had come to borrow me to help him, and it seemed zat he was a magistrate to whom the police could not well say no. The inspector tried to protest, but Sir John said, puffing out like a pigeon: '*I am responsible. I will take ze consequences.*' And zen he ses to me: 'Man, will you come?' Of course I said yes. And so we all went off in a cab, Sir John and me and two policemen, to find the automobile drawn up on a suburban street. Lady Stiles and Master Reginald Algernon Stiles were sitting very glum in the tonneau, while ze poor silly idiot of an ex-coachman was trying to make out ze trouble. It was a four-cylinder Floracq, and zis hay-motor fellow hadn't been running her for more than a week. I pushed him on one side—ver' glad was he to be pushed—and taking a lantern, had a good look round.

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“ ‘Now, man,’ said Sir John, ‘if you can get her going in ten minutes, well and good—but if not—don’t waste our time and keep us here when we ought to be on our way to the Dook’s at Duffle Castle.’

“ ‘Don’t worry,’ says I, and zen I make Lady Stiles and Master Reginald Algernon Stiles get out, noticing she had a muffler cut-out like all Floracqs. This I opened, on a little plan zat was running in my head. Zee real trouble was very small matter, but I tried the clutch levers to make sure I understood them—and practised a little in throwing them in and out, Sir John making an awful nuisance of himself, so cross he was and patronizing and fuss-cat, zo it was good in one way for he crowded back the two policemen. Ze trouble was in ze petrol feed, which was positive from ze pressure of ze exhaust, and ze check-valve it had stuck. I asked Sir John a few questions to find out how much he really knew. He knew nozing, fortunately—so I looked ver’ grave, talked a little about the chance of an explosion, and warned them all to stand back. Zen I turned over ze engine—the muffler, with the cut-out, going off like a hundred young cannon. I got in ver’ slowly, like I was scared, too, and

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ready to jump, motioning them away with my hand, and making sure I had a clear road in front. Zen, when zay were all waiting for ze bombshell to explode, I shoved in ze low, zen ze next speed, and zen before any of zem knew what had happened, I was off at forty miles an hour!

“What corsair ever made ze open sea with a more uplifted heart zan mine! I shouted, I sang, as I opened wide my throttle, and shot like a bullet out of zat unhappy town. One must have been in jail, penniless, without tobacco, without hope—to feel properly that moment of triumph when I took ze open road, and felt ze air of freedom against my cheek! I was like a madman in my joy, nevaire touching a brake, and taking the curves of the road on two wheels. I went on like zis for a dozen miles, looking to the right and left for fear I might overpass you. Zen I stopped at a deep, good-looking ditch, got out, and let the Floracq roll into it—ver’ careful, so as to hurt nozing—she sliding into it, and turning half-way over against a bank of clay. Zen I turned out ze lights, and with a bounding heart went on to look for you, walking and running by turns till I heard ze horn blowing me a welcome!”

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"How far back did you leave the car?" inquired Sutphen, who was disquieted by the thought of pursuit.

"About six—seven miles—but monsieur need not worry—I passed no one on the road—and it will take forty men to dig her out."

"They may telegraph ahead."

Alphonse shrugged his shoulders.

"Not likely," he said. "It was a ver' wrong thing of ze police to do—in France, no, not even the President could take one from a prison for private work. Zees little people have committed a frightful *béiise*, and they will be more inclined to hush it up. Altogether it is highly discreditable, and would appear very bad in a newspaper."

This was a very reassuring view; and as they debated it out it seemed more and more reasonable. The Eccles police would scarcely care to advertise their slack and obliging methods. Instead, they would probably descend on Sir John for the ten pounds in question, and make out that Alphonse had jumped his bail. It was a trifle hard on Sir John—they all grew exceedingly sorry for Sir John (except Alphonse)—to be stranded on the sidewalk with his young family while his fine car levanted in

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the dark. Sutphen said that he would see that Sir John was reimbursed those ten pounds. They couldn't do less under the circumstances, and it would be good for their consciences and their peace of mind. The local bigwig had unwittingly done them a good turn, and he oughtn't to be allowed to suffer for it.

"What about getting his car out of the ditch?" asked Essy mischievously.

"We can't do everything," replied Sutphen. "Besides, didn't Alphonse mend his old carbureter? He's that to the good, anyway!"

There are few bonds so strong as those of a common misfortune. The essence of comradeship lies in the realization that the fates are banded against you. People who would scarcely talk to one another on the deck of the ship will grow quite chummy clinging to its bottom. That night was memorable for its rich access of friendship—of loyalty and devotion. Tongues were loosened, and hearts opened. Their ridiculous plight was colored by romance, which, though it may seem small potatoes to the reader, was very real to *them*. The noble moonlight, the likelihood of pursuit, the tired yet triumphant fugitive in their midst

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—all conspired to cast a kind of poetry over that little nest in the fork of the cars.

The two men sought their bank. The two ladies again lay down with the bulb of the horn close beside them. Baby Bullet nuzzled against Gee Whiz, as though it, too, felt the need and solace of companionship. High in the sky, the great harvest-moon swam serene and refulgent, casting over all the glamour of a night that would not soon be forgotten.

Sunday proved a long day, a hard day, a hungry day. Four imperious appetites on one side; one pound one shilling and tenpence on the other. Shops being everywhere shut, they were unable to practise a proper economy. The slice of ham that would have cost sevenpence at a grocery became a shilling's worth in the cheap little eating-house which they were perforce obliged to patronize for breakfast and dinner. However, they managed to obtain two loaves of bread; and this, with a Heaven-sent *paté* that had apparently been overlooked for weeks in one of the side baskets, gave them a very slim meal by way of supper. By nightfall their budget showed a cash balance of thirteen shillings and fourpence, which was yet to carry them over Monday, and part, at least, of Tuesday.

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In other respects all went well. Gee Whiz, which, with the perversity of things mechanical, might well have taken this occasion to go wrong, stood up and ran with its accustomed perfection; Baby, ditto, though its means of disaster were limited to its steering-gear, wheels, and the ball-bearings of its hubs. But these, also, got through the day successfully. The only event, in the nature of a contretemps, was a little side-stepping they did in the direction of a gorgeous old ruin. This lay a mile off their road, a colossal ivy-clad castle that loomed so temptingly across the intervening country that it seemed almost wicked not to "take it in."

They rode up to it in state, finding to their surprise and gratification that it was in less decay than they had imagined. A great part of it was still habitable, and offered a noble promise of what was to be seen within. They descended at a massive gateway, and recklessly walked in, admiring, as they passed, the early Tudor architecture of the arched ceilings. They had got quite a distance when a snuffy old man clattered after them, demanding sixpence each! As for any chance of getting it, he might just as well have stood out for a million. There ensued a heated discussion. Our party washed their

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hands of the castle, and said, in that case, they would forego the pleasure of its acquaintance. It was a nice castle, but at sixpence it came too high. The old man said that they had passed the wicket and had consequently made themselves liable for two whole shillings. Sutphen explained that they had mistaken it for a *free* castle, and that it was the snuffy old man's fault for not informing them earlier. He offered to give him an automobile ride by way of payment, which was scornfully refused. There was nothing for it but to retreat in good order, the old man following them up to Gee Whiz, and vociferating his wrongs at the top of his voice.

They made a humiliating departure in the presence of a whole *char-à-bancs* of Cooks' tourists. Sutphen said that the historic associations of the place did not warrant sixpence, and that when you came down to first principles it was better to feed the body than the mind. But Miss Schell was very much dispirited, and was hardly comforted by his remark that "you can always say you have been there!" But she brightened up when he volunteered to return later and buy the darned place.

"Let's do it!" he exclaimed, "just for the

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pleasure of firing out that disgusting old man and reasserting our self-respect." In truth, this last was getting hourly more tattered. They were automobile hoboes, carrying off a splendid masquerade with a cash capital that hardly amounted to a good-sized tip. They learned to dread the deference and attention they everywhere excited—getting both in advance, so to speak, and then leaving the bill unsettled. They astounded the poor and lowly with their incredible meanness. The obliging laborer that put them on their way, the brisk and smiling waitress, the tatterdemalion who would insist on helping Miss Schell into Baby Bullet—all, in that expressive vulgarity, were bilked, and left in a state of angry wonder. You might have followed their course by the sullen faces that lined the road behind them.

Never was night more welcome to a weary and fleeing army than the shades of Sunday to our travelers. Again they pitched their camp beside the highway, and made a laager of Gee Whiz and Baby. Again a hard bank received the recumbent forms of Sutphen and Alphonse, while the ladies coyly retired into the seclusion of their little stockade, and fell asleep holding

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fast to each other and the tooter. Again there was a midnight flurry, this time a colt inquisitive and foolhardy, who thought to find his mother, and instead got b-o-o-o-ed out of his seven colt wits, and fled by short cut across Baby Bullet, vehemently tooting his own tooter that Nature had given him. Again the awakening in the morning, and the anxious counting of their slender store: thirteen shillings and fourpence.

But in all the privations of this fateful period there was one luxury that remained with them till the end—an ample supply of hot water! Life, in other respects, had come down to fundamentals, but this, thank Heaven, still remained. They had only to start up the engine, let it run for a few minutes, and then draw all they required from the faucet of the radiator. Shaving was thus made possible, and clean faces, and some approach to personal presentability. Here, at least, they had the pull over the hobo, not to speak of another in the small supply of necessities carried in the baskets of the two cars. However poorly the day might end, they had it in their power to make a good beginning, and it was no little satisfaction to them to still hold fast to one of the

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conventions. My nice clean reader, with money in his pockets and within easy reach of bureaus and wardrobes, will probably smile a smile—but I beg that at all events it will be a pitying one.

Monday still found the shops shut, for it was what they call in England a "Bank Holiday." This might imply that it was limited to the banks alone, but as a matter of fact it took in everything and everybody, and was as complete and paralyzing as the British Sunday. The grocer, the dairyman, and the baker, who might have done so much for our wayfarers in their respective stations, had all fled the scenes of their useful labors, and joined in the universal merrymaking. Again a costly breakfast became imperative, and four shillings and sixpence disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. This, with the extravagant purchase of a morning paper which brought to Sutphen the ironical intelligence of his being eighteen thousand dollars ahead of the New York market on Steel Preferred—reduced their cash in hand to eight shillings and ninepence! The mockery of contrast could not have been carried further. On one side what was to Sutphen a trumpery little speculation in which a rise of five points had

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put him nearly twenty thousand dollars to the good; on the other actual and tangible coin of the realm representing a trifle over two dollars!

Toward noon they began to raise the spires and buildings of a large town. The map showed it to be Maltan, and placed it within a thumb's nail of the Scottish border. On closer approach Maltan was found to be in a lively bustle. Horse-soldiers were dashing about the streets, bands were playing, and there was a general air of animation and excitement that our travelers were far from sharing. Crowds were apt to find something humorous in Baby Bullet's dusty and dishonored progress; crowds were apt to jeer and yell, and "pass remarks." They would gladly have avoided Maltan altogether, had not their road led straight through it. So they nerved themselves for the unavoidable sensation they were so sure to make, and choo-chooed slowly, and with a set and dignified expression of countenance, through the jam of holiday traffic. Every now and then, on cabs and omnibuses, their eyes were arrested by vivid printed notices in red ink:

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JUBILEE PARK *MOTOR CAR RACES*

THERE AND BACK FOR 2S. 6D.

ENTRANCE ONE SHILLING

On hoardings, fences, the doors of inns, and in the windows of tea-houses were larger and more staring sheets giving details of the races. The first two or three were disregarded. But the reiteration of another row reacted, in a marked manner, on the throttle of Gee Whiz. Certain facts clamorously forced themselves on Sutphen's attention: "Open to all comers"—"Prize of twenty guineas"—"Cars to the value of one thousand pounds and upward"—one-mile dash—for cars to the value of five hundred pounds or less—"prize of ten guineas—" The same thought flashed through all their minds. Baby was tooting loudly to halt, as Sutphen obeyed his own impulse, and pulled up beside a wall plastered forty feet wide with rows on rows of the same insistent notices.

"Let's see what it's all about," said Sutphen, running his eye down to "entrance fee, two guineas," "to take place on Monday afternoon at two o'clock sharp," "the band of the

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Border Mounted Rifles, by kind permission of Colonel Lord Fluffby, will play during the intermissions"—and then up to the staring headlines: "Grand Fête. Motor-car races. Jubilee Park track. Under the auspices of the Maltan Motor-cycle Club."

"Do you think we could afford it?" asked Essy wistfully. "It's only a shilling!"

"By the Lord Harry, why not!" exclaimed her companion, in the shiver of a great resolution. A few yards farther on he had seen the open doorway of a garage, and this had given him a sudden inspiration. He descended hurriedly, leaving Essy without a word as he strode into the place and disappeared. The Baby Bullets descended also, and wanted to know what was the matter. Essy was unable to tell them. They all waited with solemnity, feeling that something tremendous was under way, while the crowd jostled and eddied about them. In a few minutes Sutphen reappeared at the side of a large, friendly, whiskered person, with dirty cuffs and a black silk hat well tilted to the back of his head. Behind them both was a mechanic in overalls, carrying a green watering-can. The little party drew near. Sutphen was anxiously jocular. The large,

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friendly, whiskered person grew even friendlier at the sight of Gee Whiz.

"Look at them for yourself," said Sutphen.

There was a cursory examination of the acetylene gas-lamps. At a nod the mechanic came up, detached the rubber tubes, and unscrewed them from their places. Sutphen smiled significantly to Essy, and begged her to move to one side, in order to take up a floor board, and get at the gasoline tank. Then the watering-pot came into operation. Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle, and the acrid penetrating smell of that diabolical fluid. Another watering-pot, and more smell. Ditto, ditto. All this in a churchlike silence as far as Essy, Miss Schell, and Alphonse were concerned, who looked on breathlessly, in dim and uncertain comprehension. The cap was screwed on; the floor board replaced; Sutphen warmly wrung the hand of the large, friendly, whiskered person, and said that he couldn't thank him sufficiently.

"That's all right," said the latter jovially, moving off. "Glad to help you out, I'm sure. Hope you'll win, sir—hope you'll win!"

Our little party crowded together on the curb, eager, almost feverish, for an explanation. Sutphen opened his palm, and gleefully

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disclosed three golden sovereigns and three silver shillings.

"Raised it on the lamps," he explained gloatingly. "I'm going to enter Gee Whiz for the big race, and win that twenty guineas or bust!"

Essy clapped her hands.

Miss Schell audibly translated twenty guineas into one hundred and five dollars.

Alphonse, smiling from ear to ear, outlined the menu for that night's dinner.

"We'll just walk all over them!" cried Sutphen. "Redeem our lamps, and sleep to-night in real beds! What's that about grouse and asparagus? Bet your life, and champagne too!"

CHAPTER XVII

JUBILEE PARK was an immense enclosure on the outskirts of the town. The track was oval in shape, and measured a mile, the furlongs being indicated by red posts at the side. There was the usual grand stand, owner's paddocks, raised platform for the umpire, and weighing-sheds. Although it was hardly yet noon, flags were flying, the wickets were letting in streams of people, booths and hucksters were doing a roaring trade, and motley thousands were already lunching on the grass. Our little party had determined to come early, first of all, because they had no other place to go to; and secondly, lest by any mishap they might lose their right to enter Gee Whiz in the forthcoming race. They were admitted at a special gate, where a small committee with red rosettes put them through the necessary preliminaries.

The two guineas' entrance fee for Gee Whiz entitled Sutphen and Alphonse to the freedom of the enclosure. But a shilling had to be paid

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for each of the ladies, together with five shillings for Baby Bullet. This left them with the very respectable balance of one pound two shillings and ninepence, which was thought to justify a bun apiece by way of lunch, depleting the hoard to an even one pound two shillings. Sutphen was inclined to be extravagant, and include ginger-beer, but Alphonse took an unexpected stand for economy. "Let us win ze twenty guineas first," he said. "Buns were filling; ginger-beer was ostentatious. They might yet have good need for every penny."

They drew up close to the track, and after munching their buns, the two men raised the bonnet of Gee Whiz and made a long and searching examination of the machinery. A few nuts were tightened; the plugs were taken out and cleaned; the valve-seats were washed out with kerosene; the magneto, power-pump, and forced lubrication carefully looked at; grease-cups were all filled and screwed down tight; the wheels were jacked up, one after another; the casings examined for any cuts that might lead to a blow-out; the lugs were screwed home, and the nipples firmly set; the steering-gear was overhauled, and a little lost motion taken up; the driving-chains were tested,

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greased, and turned over for an examination of the master-links.

Essy's interest in these careful preparations turned suddenly to alarm. At first she had regarded the race as something of a joke—an attractive and probably easy means of winning twenty guineas—a little spin round the course, and all their troubles ended! Sutphen's face, keen, grave, and thoughtful, gave her the first misgiving of danger. At either end the oval track turned very sharply, and Alphonse and he debated in a low voice on how much "slew" they could dare risk.

"Well, it's just this," said Alphonse, who was all for caution, "you stake your life on the tire, and if she blows up——!"

"There's always that chance," interrupted Sutphen. "All racing is dangerous, but there isn't much difference in risk between being first or second."

"Sometimes there's a hole in the fence," said Alphonse significantly.

"Wish it didn't look so blame solid." Sutphen laid his hand on one of the posts.

"Regular piles, Alphonse."

"Monsieur positively will not permit me to drive?"

"No," said Sutphen, in a voice that was only partially audible to Essy's strained ears, which were distracted besides by Miss Schell's constant chatter. . . . "You've never seen Oldfield, or you wouldn't say that." . . . "On two wheels, I tell you, right off the ground, with room enough to shove your fist in." . . . "Then bust her, damn it, and take all that's coming." . . . "Most likely it will be a walkover, against two or three low-powered double-cylinder cars." . . . "Good heavens, of course I won't." . . . "A yard is as good as a mile." . . . "I'm not out for glory, but for the prize." . . . "Yes, on my honor." . . . "The boobies will be all the better pleased." . . . "What I want is that twenty guineas!"

Essy was very pale when the two men rejoined her and Miss Schell. On the plea of a little walk about the course she took the opportunity to earnestly beseech Sutphen to abandon the race. He refused good-humoredly, though greatly touched at her concern. Her pleading, her evident distress, the little break in her voice—all moved him with an inexpressible pleasure. He had to shake off the temptation to accept the rôle she was assigning to

him. His healthy, honest, American hatred of shams and affectations came to his rescue.

"You're making a mountain out of it," he said, "and are trying to have me appear far more foolhardy than I really am. Here's a Heaven-sent chance to pick up twenty guineas, but if it involves too much danger, I'll let the other fellow have it. As for going over Gee Whiz, that's only a common-sense precaution—and Alphonse is a good deal of an old woman, anyway."

Continuing in this strain he soon talked Essy out of her fears. His caution, his self-reliance, his boyish frankness never showed to better advantage. An Anglo-Saxon is always uncomfortable under an implication of heroism. He will often pretend to be a worse man than he is, in order to escape notice. Sutphen was determined, at any hazard, to win that twenty guineas; but wild horses could not have forced him to openly make the admission. He sheltered his resolution beneath an air of nonchalant and humorous self-depreciation. They rejoined the others in the best of spirits, more as though the prize were already won than if it had yet to be fought for. Essy, without knowing exactly why, felt reassured and happy;

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and her radiant face and eyes sparkling with excitement drew many an admiring look in her direction.

The crowd grew thicker. The grand stand filled. Members of the Maltese Motor-cycle Club, rosetted and self-important, with the cross look that always goes with amateur authority, could be seen arguing and gesticulating in the roped-off space reserved for their deliberations. The band of the Border Mounted Rifles marched in, playing—strange and happy augury—the Stars and Stripes Forever. Ten thousand people applauded the arrival of the umpire as he rose above the sea of heads and took his conspicuous station on the platform. There was another cheer as Colonel Lord Fluffby was seen to enter a flag-draped box and blandly assign seats to the considerable party that accompanied him. It was not lost on the crowd that Colonel Lord Fluffby so arranged matters that he had a very pretty woman on either side of him. Above the din of voices could be heard the shrill clack-clack of the motor-cycles as their owners tried them out in the reserved paddock, and the hoarse tooting of automobiles as they forced their way through the crush and calmly annexed the most

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favorable positions from which to see the race. Something in the nature of stage fright manifested itself in our little party. They could hardly conceal their embarrassment as an official elbowed his way up to them and stuck an immense paper 3 on each side of Gee Whiz's tonneau. The crowd audibly wanted to know about Baby Bullet, and why it had escaped a similar honor? Poor Baby, as always, was the cause of mirth, and Miss Schell flushed hotly over the dubious attention it excited.

There were seven numbers on the card. The first was a motor-cycle race; the second a motor-tricycle race. The third was a trial between the respective winners of these two events, now to be pitted against each other. It proved rather a tame affair, owing to the motor-cycle breaking its chain almost at the start. The fourth was more interesting—between a dozen men of the Border Mounted Rifles *en bloc* against a similar number of men drawn from the members of the club. They were started two minutes apart, and as the race was for ten miles it developed some interesting features. Each squad was necessarily limited to the speed of its slowest cycle, and the spectacle of the laggards in each case, toot-

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ing forlornly for their companions to slow down, was keenly enjoyed by the crowd. Altogether it was a most confused and mixed-up race with only seven survivors of the Rifles and eight of the club members, and even these kept no formation, and straggled in higgledy-piggledy. The mob, as usual, was on the side of the uniform, and hooted loudly as the umpire gave his decision against the military. Colonel Lord Fluffby left his box, and with gestures of extreme indignation, and a great waving of plumes, mounted the steps of the umpire's platform as though to take physical redress. The mob invited him to punch the umpire's head, and was very much disappointed at the fracas degenerating into a mere altercation, in the course of which the Colonel pounded the rail instead of his opponent. Rosetted individuals flung themselves on both disputants, and restored some appearance of accord. Colonel Lord Fluffby was led away protesting, getting fiercer as the distance increased. The umpire could be seen throwing up his job. Committeemen headed him off as he tried to skip down the stairs. He was coaxed to remain, and did so at last with a very ill-used air, and a face pale with anger. The crowd advised him to

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"look up Fluffby after the show and 'ave it out!" and "Don't you stand it, Whiskers!"

Whiskers glared down, as though, like another Nero, he wished humanity had but a single neck. Had he been provided with the lesser powers of that redoubtable fiddler, the population of the British Isles would probably have been found considerably reduced. There would certainly have been a notable disappearance of Colonel Lord Fluffby and ten thousand Maltanians from this scene of human activity. But being unable to carry out so summary a vengeance, he consoled himself with a large cigar, and called the fifth race. This was a go-as-you-please obstacle race for motor-cycles, with brushwood barricades, hurdles, a labyrinth of barrels, feather-beds, and plank cross-fences with narrow openings. It took a lot of winning, and the suspense was continued to almost the very end, when the prize fell to the tortoise of the field, a striped young giant, who walked in, so to speak, on the others' bones.

Number six brought Gee Whiz into action. The hearts of our little party beat high as they wished Sutphen Godspeed, and watched him, from the height of Baby Bullet, forcing his way to the starting-post. Two cars rolled in

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against him: one an old-fashioned two-cylinder Mars, with tube ignition; and the other, horror of horrors, a splendid new six-cylinder English Dorrien, stripped for racing, with a tin seat for its driver. Car for car, Gee Whiz was easily the master of the Englishman, but the weight of its top and body—all of four hundred pounds—was a very serious handicap. Tools, spare parts, and the unpacked baskets easily added another hundred. More power was offset by more weight and a greater wind resistance. The three opponents silently took one another's measure, as they choo-chooed up to the line—for the start was to be from standing. There was the usual fuss and bustle, and running about of committeemen, together with a shattering series of explosions as the three engines turned over simultaneously and fired off an occasional charge of gas into their respective mufflers. The crowd, with awe-stricken countenances, waited for somebody to blow up. The starter, pistol in hand, walked from car to car, asking if each were ready. He raised his pistol. He fired. And amid a roar from ten thousand throats the three contestants shot forward.

The Mars held its pace abreast for a dozen yards, and then fell behind. Gee Whiz and

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the Dorrien held on side by side, giving neither the advantage of a hair. They both had speed in reserve, for the sharp curve of the oval—sharp at least for a racing clip—had to be sampled before they could really dare pit their strength against each other. The event was for three miles—or three times around the course—and the race turned on the good judgment used in taking these curves. The Englishman, who was nearer the inner fence, took his without trouble and hardly a skid, while Sutphen, on the larger circumference, fared equally well. Both had been overcautious, and as they opened on their homeward stretch they let out their power, and gave the engines further head. Sutphen gained a couple of yards' advantage, and then fell into line, the crowd's yell of exultation dying out as suddenly as it had risen.

They approached the starting-point again with express-train velocity, their chains purring loudly, and the Englishman boiling out steam from the vent of his water-tank. Sutphen widened his sideways distance and lost ground, while his opponent, with a terrific slew that turned his car half round, shot a shower of gravel into the faces of the spectators. Sut-

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phen grazed his wheel, dodged a collision, and suddenly shot ahead. He was now warmed up to the point when nothing seemed to matter—when the only thought was to win—at any cost, at any risk. The roar of the crowd told him that he was increasing his advantage, though how much or how little he could not say, as his own engine drowned the fierce panting of his pursuer. He advanced the spark, bending under the crushing impact of air, and wondering, as though in a dream, whether he'd ever round the curve. He threw out his clutch, and took it on his brakes, careening over like a ship as he caught a momentary glimpse of tin cans and broken bottles that might a second later receive his broken and bleeding body. But the second found him instead once more on an even keel, and heading for the second stretch home. A turn of his head showed him the spider-like chassis of the Dorrien, and a dazzling glint of sunshine reflected from its metal seat. He was conscious of an immense sense of irritation—of studied and deliberate insult—of injustice and humiliation. The fellow would not be shaken off, was even working up a couple of feet; and deluging him besides with a hot breath of steam. He advanced his spark

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till his engines pounded, and all to no purpose. Amid a furious uproar the Dorrien gained on him, inch by inch. The Dorrien passed him. The sea of faces in front melted, and fell back, flying from disaster.

Again there was a grinding of gravel, a slew of driving wheels that threatened to pare the casings clean to the tube, a dizzy rise in the air, and a lightning glimpse of the Dorrien scrunching off the top rail of the fence. Then he was alone again, outward bound for the last time, hoping viciously that the Englishman was done for. How he hated the crowd that again, in a hoarse and rising bellow of delight, warned him that the Dorrien was still behind him, and pressing him hard. Sutphen set his teeth and, crouching over his wheel, threw all remaining caution to the wind. He staked his life on luck and good workmanship. On he came like a whirlwind, again he saw the bottles and tin cans, the swift-turning fence with its solid posts, the torn-up gravel where already twice he had shaved destruction. The great car swerved in answer to the wheels; there was a sickening twist—a jar, a leap, and a roasting smell of fiber as he drove down his brakes against the power. He spun violently across the track—

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but not over, thank God—not over! There was a vision of the Dorrien flashing in the sun twenty yards behind him—a harsh jangle of gears—a shave of the inner fence, with the mud-guard doubling up like paper—and then he was free, with the open road before him, and the roar of thousands ringing in his ears. He sped down the course like an arrow, roar following roar. He snatched a desperate look behind, almost expecting to see the Dorrien's nose in his muffler, for he had mistaken the wafted heat of his own engine for the enemy. But there were thirty yards between them, and the race was already won. He slowed down, smartly rounded the last curve, and rode into victory.

The crowd surged and cheered about him. Strange hands reached out and shook his own. The Dorrien thundered in, and came to a stand-still with a whirl of brakes. Spent with the reaction, Sutphen was so nervous that it was a trial to him to guide his car through the mob that opened out a lane before him to Baby Bullet. But what a welcome he received! Essy, Miss Schell, Alphonse—they, too, had their reaction. They all wept and laughed and disgraced themselves generally before the

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gaping public. They were incoherent with delight, relief, and the sense of averted tragedy. They clung to him, their hero—unashamed and triumphant, everything else forgotten in the joy that he was safe.

Sutphen took off his goggles, rubbed the dirt out of the corners of his eyes, and said:

“ I guess I’ll go round and collect that twenty guineas! ”

CHAPTER XVIII

A RED-HEADED young man with an expression of intense hostility was seen making his way toward them. Sutphen recognized his opponent of the Dorrien car, and his heart fell a little as he apprehended something in the nature of a scene. Why couldn't the fellow take his defeat like a man? Sutphen rapidly cast back in his mind for anything he might have done that could justify so extreme an expression of anger. He felt quite guiltless, but it jarred on him as a man of the world that the Englishman, after putting up so fine a race, should lack the good nature and the sportsman's instinct to acquiesce generously in the result. So he braced himself, and waited for what apparently was about to be a very disagreeable interview.

The red-headed young man raised his leather cap.

"We've been flimflammed," he burst out. "I thought we were racing for twenty guineas!"

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"Why, of course we were," answered Sutphen, appreciating with relief that the hostility was not directed against himself.

"Well, they've had the unmitigated cheek to substitute a measly cup. Do you hear? A CUP—and that without by your leave or anything! Of course, I am out of it, and its none of my business—but I feel just as much cheated as you are, and I hope you'll sue them for the money. When you race for twenty guineas, you want twenty guineas—not a blankety blankety CUP!"

"But it said twenty guineas on the posters!" exclaimed Sutphen. "It's impossible for them to go back on that! How do you know it's a cup?"

"Because I've SEEN IT," returned the red-headed young man explosively. "It's over there in a red plush case. Such a rotten cup, too, and engraved all over for somebody else! Blest if it isn't for a golf championship—for Larribie, the defaulting solicitor, who was to have had it presented to him before it all became public and he escaped to South America. At the last moment it occurred to Major Titcombe, who made himself responsible to the jewelers (for the Golf Club went all to pieces,

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you know), that he could work it in here and kill two birds with one stone."

"But it's outrageous," stormed Sutphen. "I went into this race for twenty guineas! It said twenty guineas in letters a foot high! I will not be treated in this high-handed fashion!"

"We were the event of the day," said the red-headed young man, "and now they're trying to do us—for I'm as sore about it as you are! It's nothing else but a colossal bilk, and it makes a fellow's blood boil!"

"Let's go along and have it out right now," said Sutphen. "You'll stand by me, won't you, and show me that Titcombe?"

They shook hands on it. The red-headed young man was exuberantly friendly. He blurted out something about the race, and the best man winning. It was with evident pride that he put his arm through Sutphen's, and led him away, taking fire afresh that his companion should be fobbed off with a cup, and robbed—literally robbed—by "that draper fellow," the Volunteer Major.

There was a stormy meeting with the committee. Sutphen saw the cup and repudiated it with indignation. The Major was sent for,

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and arrived gasping. He was a tall, thin man with a tallowy face. He said it had been a most unfortunate mistake—the fault of the printer—positively the fault of the printer, who had not obeyed the telephoned correction. Sutphen could clearly sue the printer, and it would serve the fellow right. Personally, Major Titcombe disclaimed all responsibility. He deeply felt the false position, in which, as Secretary of the Maltan Motor-cycle Club, he had been inadvertently placed. Mr. Sutphen had every right to feel ill-used, but would it not perhaps be better to bow to circumstances, and—accept the cup? It was a very handsome cup! It was a magnificent cup! The club would see that the present inscription was ground off, and Mr. Sutphen's name substituted, together with a record of his remarkable and sensational race. He, Major Titcombe, promised to give the matter his personal attention, and send it by registered parcels post to any address that Mr. Sutphen might indicate.

Sutphen's recent opponent, the red-headed young man, kept up an incessant fire of objections and insults. He pooh-poohed all difficulties in the way of a cash settlement. He commented on the enormous amount of the

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gate-money, and the singular, not to say pettifogging, meanness of the Motor-cycle Club in sheltering itself behind the printer. He loudly declaimed that the club was responsible, and appealed wildly to the crowd, to abstract justice—to the House of Lords! There was an interminable wrangle. Everybody said the same thing over and over again. The Major stood his ground without flinching, and grew a little sarcastic about a *gentleman*, with emphasis on the word, caring so much for money. A *gentleman*, said the Major, would accept a cup!

Sutphen, out of all patience, and seeing that anything like satisfaction was unattainable, brought the affair to a conclusion by grabbing the cup out of its case, and bearing it off in his arms, leaving the red-headed young man to continue the battle single-handed.

In the beginning of the discussion, Alphonse had hurriedly come up, and asked him for what money he had in his pocket. He had given it without a thought, but now, as he forced his way toward his friends, the fact occurred to him disagreeably. Alphonse had stripped him of every penny! How stupid he had been not to ask the reason for this demand on their last

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remaining capital. But, still, Alphonse must have realized that they had been chiseled out of their twenty guineas, and that every sixpence was now of vital importance!

He was in the whirl of these reflections when he was thunderstruck to see that Baby Bullet was no longer beside the big car! Where had it disappeared to? He quickened his pace, and came up running to the two ladies, both comfortably ensconced in the tonneau of Gee Whiz. Hugging the egregious cup, he put his foot on the step, and was about to open the door when he was stupefied by the apparition of Baby Bullet on the track!

If Baby had taken wings and flown skyward he could not have been more amazed. What was Baby doing on the track? Why was it teetering along, under the guiding hand of Alphonse, around that vast and empty circumference? Racing? No! There were no competitors. Besides, who in his senses would dream of pitting Baby against even a gasoline lawn-mower, let alone the humblest form of automobile? Sutphen waited for officials to rush in and vindicate the Maltan Motor-cycle Club from this singular and extraordinary impertinence. But nobody rushed. Baby con-

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tinued unmolested on its snail-like career, whizzing and panting out of all proportion to its stately and deliberate progress.

Essy, in a state of trembling excitement, hastened to enlighten him. The two other small cars, entered for the "one-mile dash," had on the eve of it locked wheels, and so materially damaged each other that neither could run. Alphonse had jumped at the opportunity so unexpectedly presented, and had paid a guinea and got in Baby Bullet before the event could be called off. They had tried to bluff him out, but Alphonse had held his ground, and had insisted so effectually on his rights that here he was, winning the ten-guinea prize on a walkover!

Sutphen felt a lightning pang of misgiving. A walkover, yes, if Baby were capable of running a whole non-stop mile! But suppose Baby couldn't! That would leave them with precisely one shilling in the world. But a second look was reassuring. Baby was holding up well, and had already successfully covered a quarter of the distance. Sutphen's heart suddenly warmed toward the chunky little car. He regretted some of the harsh thoughts that he had entertained against it. He remembered

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with compunction how often he had groaned under its enforced society; how cordially he had wished it a thousand times to the devil; how he had revolted against the endless annoyance of that endless tow! And here now was Baby, the despised, the derided, the Cinderella of motordom, bravely attempting to save the day, and gather in the ten guineas that would put them in affluence!

It would take a poet, a tremendous poet, a forty-cent-a-word and British-rights-reserved poet, to do any kind of justice to Miss Schell's ecstatic feelings. In her wildest dreams for Baby Bullet she never could have conjectured so sensational a vindication. Here was the answer to those slighting looks, those sulky sighs of submission to her caprice, those veiled and humorous taunts that had so long distressed her. Who could say now that Baby was a drag and an affliction? Little though they had known it, they had been towing, for all those dusty miles, their preserver-to-be!

With what complacency she watched Baby Bullet turn the half-mile, and still grandly moving, take its homeward course! How steadily and majestically it kept on the way, undeterred by the jeers of the ribald and the loud

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yells of "Get a horse!" Baby was taking no chances. It scorned spectacular display. It was coolly intent on earning that ten guineas—slowly, surely, and with no unnecessary strain to its complicated mechanism. Little by little it betrayed an increasing deliberation of movement. Why was Alphonse so frenziedly pulling levers and turning doo-dubs on the dash? What was the meaning of that strange low squealing that grew squealier and squealier?

Baby's pace drooped from eight miles an hour to six, and from six to three. It had passed the six-furlong post now, and port was near. Could it but continue at three, the goal would be quickly reached. Alphonse's convulsions, coupled with this decline in Baby's powers, took on an ominous character; worse still, when he jumped out, and steering with one hand, was seen to be attempting interior adjustments with the other. The crowd burst into a huge roar of delight. Tears streamed down Miss Schell's face. Essy and Sutphen held their breath, and dared not look at each other. But Baby picked up a little, and with a loud squeal came near running away altogether from Alphonse, who, after some abortive efforts, successfully hopped in and again

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took command. There were a few hectic moments of ten miles an hour, Baby advancing in little leaps like a frolicsome dog playing with a ball. The winning line was scarcely fifteen yards distant, and could it but keep it up, the race was gained. But of a sudden, with a weird and agonizing guzzle—no other word can describe that strange and forbidding sound—it slowed down to a crawl and threatened to come to a standstill. Alphonse played his last card. He threw in the low-gear clutch. The little car staggered—then picked up. It rumbled and shook, the incessant squealing, half-drowned in the reverberation of its colicky engine. It licked up yard after yard. The fifteen had become ten, the ten five—and Baby was still perceptibly moving. The committee had to resist a humane impulse to throw themselves upon it, and drag it in. Not to do so was like refusing a rope to a perishing man. And Baby's extremity was no less patent to all. Its driving-wheels scarcely turned; the squealing died down to a moan; and then—two feet from victory, it came to a full, final, and complete stop.

It was well for our little party that they had no time to mourn. A blow is easier to

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bear when it brings with it the need for instant action. Baby had overheated, and its transmission was stuck so hard and tight that it was impossible to budge it an inch till the driving-chain had been removed. Even then, so dire had been the interior damage, Baby pulled more like a farmer's sled than a thing on four wheels. Sutphen hinted at deserting it altogether; and left it open to Miss Schell to make the suggestion—but Miss Schell, true even in that desolating moment to the Despardoux, offered a countenance of such appeal and misery that there was nothing for it but to resume the tow.

As they hastened away from that scene of humiliation, a discovery was made that seemed the concluding disaster of that whole disastrous day. Alphonse could not find the shilling! Though he searched his pockets forty times—though he rose and wriggled and shook himself—though the others shook him and rattled him, too, the shilling had absolutely and unequivocally disappeared. Pliers, wire, copper terminals, cuttings from technical journals, pocket-comb, soap, two picture post-cards, amperemeter, split washers, needle, and spool of thread—but no shilling! His despair was so

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pitiable that no one had the heart to reproach him. They gazed at one another in silent consternation. They were penniless!

They rode disconsolately through the streets, eager to escape and hide in the open country beyond. They were too weary to engage in the explanations that might have earned them the charity of the Maltanians. They lacked the courage to undergo the ordeal. No doubt, some friendly hotel might have taken them in pawn, but it seemed too exhausting a matter to search for it through a gauntlet of rebuffs, impertinence, and insulting questions. Nature, that gives nothing, but asks nothing, appeared in contrast infinitely the preferable. They had reached the pitch when it was easier to endure than to fight.

Three golden balls, a shabby hook-nosed figure in a doorway, a shuttered shop—! Sutphen, on the spur of the moment, drew up beside the curb, descended, and seizing the silver cup in his arms, fled back without a word. Yes, Mr. Abrahams was always ready to do peezi-ness. A small advance on a piece of plate? Ting, ting—real silver—come inside, and let us see it! Sutphen followed the Jew into the dark recesses of the shop. The old man turned up

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the gas, examined the cup carefully, weighing it in his hand and looking for the hall-mark. Then he read the inscription, and his heavy eyebrows rose with suspicion.

"Hem, a golf trophy," he said, gazing queerly at Sutphen's leather cap and goggles.

"Yes, I won it just now in a motor-race!" exclaimed Sutphen innocently.

The old man again raised the cup carefully, dusted it, put it back securely on a shelf, and in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone remarked: "I tink you'd better go before I send for the police!"

"I want five pounds on it," said Sutphen, who hardly appreciated the situation.

"You're more likely to get five months' hard," observed the pawnbroker grimly.

"Get out of here, you teef," and with that he began to scream "Iky, Iky!" at the top of his voice.

There was a struggle for the cup, the old man yelling louder than ever, and resisting tooth and nail as Sutphen tore it out of his grasp. Iky came running in, and made a dive for the door to lock it. He staggered with a blow under the ear. Sutphen fought past him, and with the pair vociferating in his wake, ran

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out, jumped into Gee Whiz, and started off. There were loud cries of "Stop thief! stop thief!" and "Perlice, murder, fire!" The streets filled as though by magic, and a hundred voices and two hundred legs took up the pursuit. Sutphen increased his speed, dodging a policeman who raised his hand, and scattering the new crowds that tried to bar his way. A cohort of bicyclists swarmed about him, spreading the hue and cry, and refusing to be shaken off. Cabs, carriages, meat, vegetable, and ice-cream wagons joined them in a pell-mell rush. Collisions were avoided by a hair; a hay-wagon tried to barricade the street, but Sutphen took the sidewalk with a bump and a crash, and flew gloriously past it. One of the bicyclists drew a knife, and tried to stab at the tires, but Alphonse, seizing an opportunity, batted him over the head with his clinched fist. The streets swiftly gave way to wide suburban roads, bordered with handsome houses set in gardens. Sutphen threw in his third speed. The horse and foot dropped behind, unable to keep pace with him. Even the panting bicyclists began to lag.

At this moment when the day seemed won, and fields and pastures opened out before them,

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a malign fate disgorged from a lane on their right flank two complete squadrons of the Border Mounted Rifles! The military took in the situation at a glance, and with a sharp wheel bugled out the signal to charge!

CHAPTER XIX

IT was one thing to fly from the police, and quite another to affront the armed strength of Britain! It was a paralyzing sensation to look behind and see those serried ranks, those foam-flecked horses, that jingling and terrific mass thundering after them two hundred strong. Suppose they unslung those long rifles and opened fire! Suppose, in their maddened impetuosity, the soldiers should saber them in their seats! There rose faint, feminine screams for surrender. But Sutphen would not hear them. He threw in his fourth speed, advanced the spark, and gave Gee Whiz the open throttle.

Oh, accursed Despardoux! Oh, little car of infamy and misfortune! Why dost thou drag so heavily, robbing thy fleet brother of a full twenty miles an hour? Without thee, how easily could the massed manhood of England have been distanced. How blithely could we have tooted our mellow horn, and seen them fade into insignificance and dust. It is to thee,

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and thy bank-safe progression, that we find ourselves risking ignominious capture. Woe to the designer who drew thee, to the mills that forged thee, to the mechanics that assembled thee, to the wild romancer who palmed thee off for good red gold! Cease that sad squealing, that grinding and guzzling, that rasp and torture of your discredited interior! Lift thy feet, little car, and run for thy life, or else assuredly the British will crash upon us!

Fourth speed and all, the pursuit was distinctly gaining. Foot by foot, the straining horses were overtaking them, spurred to a supreme endeavor by their frantic riders. The squadrons had lost all formation, tailing out for nearly a mile; but in the van, a compact body of forty or more held to the trail with the pertinacity of wolves. The pounding of hoofs, the clatter and bang of accouterments, the hoarse cries—all raised a volume of sound that every instant grew more appalling. But so tremendous a spurt could not be kept up for long. Could only Gee Whiz maintain the lead for ten minutes, steel would indubitably triumph over horse-flesh. Steel, however, hampered by Baby Bullet, and with a hill looming close in front, was in a truly desperate plight. If Gee

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Whiz were losing on the level, what chance had the great car against a grade?

Sutphen hurriedly gave directions to Essy. She, in pantomime, telegraphed them on to Alphonse, who, with Miss Schell, was cowering in Baby Bullet. A shout went up from the foremost horsemen, as the significance of the signal was borne in on them; and one young officer, magnificently mounted, broke line and shot ahead of his companions, in the hope of personally thwarting the design. Never was anything more smartly managed. Gee Whiz came to an abrupt stop; Miss Schell made a headlong rush into its tonneau, as Alphonse, deftly cutting the tow-rope, sprang after her—contenting himself with a precarious foothold on the step. It seemed as though they could almost hear the swish of sabers above their heads as Sutphen threw in his clutch, and with the full value of his mighty engine sped forward with the velocity of an express. Hill and all, there was not a horse in England that could overtake the powerful car now that it was divorced of Baby. It flew up the grade at thirty miles an hour, stopping serenely at the top for a look back.

Below them, in a confused sea of uniforms, was poor Baby Bullet, standing desolate and

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pitiful. An officer tooted its little horn, and the sound rose like a wail of anguish and despair. It was with the feeling of deserting a faithful comrade that our little party gazed back at that pathetic scene. Baby's shortcomings were forgotten. In its puny fashion it had served them long and well. It had never chewed up its ball-bearings, nor broken a single knuckle of its steering-gear. What can any one do more than his best? Baby's makers had committed it to mechanical impossibilities, for which it was in no sense responsible. And here it was, thrown to the wolves, its last act a sacrifice for others! They waved their hands to it in farewell. It was a sad, sad moment. Miss Schell snuffled audibly, refusing to be comforted. She broke down utterly as the captive was harnessed up to two led horses, and its little head turned toward Maltan. It was only a kindness to spare her more of so painful and embittering a sight. So with heavy hearts they continued on their way, a frayed and dragging rope the only memento of the past.

Baby's loss took on a more practical aspect when a few hours later they decided to make their camp. Not only was its chunky little form lacking for the laager, but the scanty wardrobe

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of the two ladies had disappeared in those storm-beaten baskets that had fallen a prey to the military. It was the most melancholy camp of the three. Supper consisted of some plain boiled water. Hardships had begun in earnest. Hunger gnawed. There was not even tobacco. The only thing that seemed left to them was the moon!

Sutphen and Essy took a forlorn little walk along the road. The former carried a rug in the faint hope of being able to barter it at some farmhouse for food. But no such friendly haven appeared—nothing but an unending hedge on either side, and a few lights twinkling miles away on the slopes of the hills. At length, tired and disheartened, they seated themselves on a grassy bank, and resigned all hopes of supper.

“Do you know the difference between poverty and destitution?” asked Sutphen cheerlessly.

“I thought they were the same thing.”

“Oh, no—poverty means that you haven’t enough—destitution that you haven’t anything. Yesterday was poverty; to-night is destitution!”

“You don’t know what a comfort it is to

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learn the distinction. That's the benefit of associating with a college man, I suppose. I feel better already!"

"It's the only thing I remember of a three months' course in Social Science—that, and the fact that the submerged tenth always keep their coal in the bath-tub."

They both laughed drearily.

"How different it will all be to-morrow," said Essy.

"Oh, to-morrow!" exclaimed Sutphen. "It's too tormenting even to think of to-morrow. We shall be rolling in luxury, and ordering about head-waiters—and all this will seem like a bad dream."

"Think of those poor people who haven't any to-morrow!"

Sutphen refused to see the pathos of those abstract phantoms.

"I'm too busy thinking about myself," he said. "Or you, I ought to say, for I can't tell you how it hurts me to have you suffer. By Jove, I wouldn't mind so much if I were by myself, but it's unbearable to look on helplessly while you——"

"Oh, I don't mind so much—truly, I don't. I just feel a little numb inside, that's all!"

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"People in Nature books always suck pebbles. Won't you have a pebble?"

"If you can find a nice clean one."

He groped about in the dark. It was apparently not a pebble country. A piece of barrel-hoop was all that could be found. He flung it disdainfully into the middle of the road.

"Just our luck," he said despondently. "A pebble would have done you good, I am sure—a beautiful white pebble that you could have kept afterward as a memento."

"I sha'n't need any memento to remember this!"

"It's awful, isn't it?"

"Yet, do you know, in a queer sort of way I like it. The splendid Gorkyism of it appeals to me—the man, woman, and open sky—hunger, and stars—and you being so sorry for me, you know!"

"It's hard to praise people without sounding patronizing—but may I say it?"

"Oh, don't be afraid of being too complimentary!"

"No, but really—I don't believe there is another girl in the world who would have been so sweet and patient and helpful and dear. 'Pon my soul, I mean it in all seriousness—

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it—it brings the tears to a fellow's eyes, you know."

"It makes me glad to hear you say that. It shows I've been true to the grand old tradition. It's the man's place to struggle and fight, and the woman's to pet him and console him, and be his little tin angel."

"Well, you have. I couldn't begin to tell you how much I have admired you for it. I mean how it's come home to me what a little thoroughbred you are!"

"Perhaps it has come home to me too—about you!"

"Has it? It would make me a very happy man to think so."

"Then be happy, because it's true."

He felt for her hand, and held it close in a big, warm grasp. Essy did not attempt to withdraw it. A wonderful sweetness and serenity seemed to descend upon them both.

"But Henrietta—?" she whispered.

He pressed her hand and answered nothing. He was looking up at the stars, as though in the magic of that touch he hesitated to break the silence and return to earth.

"You've been so good," she went on in the same low soft voice. "So considerate always

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—so generous and tender—don't spoil it all now. Our friendship is too precious to lose it in a flirtation."

"I told you the truth about Henrietta," he returned slowly. "On my honor, the absolute truth. Give me the credit for having played fair from the beginning. Even when I told you about it that night I was already half in love with you."

Essy listened with half-shut eyes in a delicious languor. She was thankful for the darkness that made her silence possible. The woman in her was thrillingly conscious of her companion's broad shoulders, of his big hand that held hers in so tight a clasp, of his deep and mellow voice. Suddenly he put his arms about her, and drew her to his breast. Her weary head sank against him in an exquisite contentment. In that tender mastery how was it possible for her to resist, though she tried to keep her lips from his as he rained kisses on her face, and murmured incoherently that he loved her—that he had always loved her—that he had not dared speak before from very dread that he might lose her? He besought her in a whisper to marry him, crushing her in his arms with a violence that made her tremble with delight.

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She said "yes," and again "yes," as he forced her to the avowal—as he put the words into her mouth and made her repeat them—those words that shamed her in the saying—those confessions of her pent-up girlish heart. Sutphen was transported as he felt her lips against his hand, her shy and caressing cheek, her warm tumultuous breath—that adorable surrender, intoxicating, rapturous, humbling.

There, under the open sky, penniless and hungry, they plighted their troth; a moment, sacred and ecstatic, in which vows were made and words spoken that were to shine through the intervening years, resplendent and undiminished to the end. Their absurd predicament no longer caused them the least concern. What did it matter now that of food there was none, and of gasoline less than a gallon and a half! They even agreed that they would not have had it otherwise if they could. It seemed to enhance their love that it had bloomed in their hour of dejection and fatigue; that it was then they had turned to each other, and found in their hearts a treasure the world could never rob them of. How blithely they walked back, hand in hand, to carry the good news to Miss Schell and Alphonse!

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The writer must admit that it proved less exciting to these two than our lovers had anticipated. A cold roast chicken would have created infinitely more of a sensation. At first they were inclined to ascribe the others' high spirits to something of the kind, and the truth came out as rather an anticlimax. But still, Miss Schell attempted, not ungraciously, to proffer the becoming congratulations. Alphonse put more ginger into his, and frisked about to show his approval, and prevent the announcement from seeming to fall too flat.

"Now crowd up close, and listen to what I'm going to say," said Sutphen. "I want you to realize you have a millionaire in the family, and though he isn't John D., or an Uncle Russell, he's going to deal out everybody here a full house, ace-high!"

Sitting there on the ground, with his hands in his empty pockets, Essy nestling beside him, and Alphonse and Miss Schell snugly completing the little circle, Sutphen proceeded to raise the spirits of the last two to the delirious heights of his own. He was overflowing with affection for the elderly lovers whose lot was in such a contrast to his own, and to whom the future was so misty and uncertain. He was

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eager to share with them his own happiness, and make this glorious night one that would stand out forever in their lives as well as his own. He wished to offset the least little pang they might otherwise have felt. He was in the humor of a successful stock-broker showering five-dollar bills on the newsboys, and presenting Lazarus with a new suit of clothes and a ticket for the circus.

"Now about that twelve thousand francs for the agency of the Pattosien tire," he said. "It seems to me that Alphonse has earned it twice over. Besides, he'll need a little to spare to get settled on the other side. Let's call it five thousand dollars, and make it a wedding-present from Essy and myself!"

"Oh, monsieur—" vociferated Alphonse. "How can I express to monsieur—oh, Christine, speak for me—do you hear, speak, in words from ze heart——"

Miss Schell was regarding Sutphen as though he had suddenly gone mad. She wondered if hunger had made him light-headed. The magnitude of the sum overwhelmed her. When she spoke, it was with a curious break in her voice.

"I am afraid I do not know how to thank you," she said. "You have made our future

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very easy for us. It would have always weighed on me to start our married life in debt, even to so kind and good a man as yourself."

Then ensued an audible nudging and whispering in the dark.

"Alphonse says I must—kiss you," quavered Miss Schell helplessly.

"It is *imperatif!*" thundered the Frenchman. "Me, I command it! Courtesy, gratitude, honor—all command it."

Sutphen sprang forward and gallantly settled Miss Schell's hesitation. There was an embarrassed scramble, the whisk of a feminine ear, an unexpected familiarity with some dry stiff curls—and it was done. Everybody breathed freer when the rite was over, and Sutphen hastened to relieve the constraint that followed by hurriedly throwing in a furnished flat.

"I want you to order everything regardless," he said to Miss Schell. "The nicest things you can buy and the prettiest, with carpets an inch thick, and silver and napkins and cut-glass and pictures and a piano and andirons—and you are to accept it from Essy and myself, and invite us to dinner when everything is ready—just us four, you know—and we'll have such

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a house-warming and hurrah-boys and champagne and chicken and terrapin that we'll rub our eyes to think that we were ever here at all, without a bean to our names or a roof to our heads, or a——!"

"Crust!" interrupted Essy. "That's always what people haven't got when they're starving—it's never a ham sandwich or a loin of veal—but invariably a *crust!*"

"Well, crust, then," added Sutphen. "I don't know what it is, but we certainly haven't got it."

"How little it seems to matter now!" exclaimed Miss Schell. "Oh, Mr. Sutphen, I won't try to thank you again. I can't. But I think I am the happiest person in the world!"

"No, I'm that myself," cried Sutphen. "And that isn't all, either—I mean the flat isn't—for you must have a little car to take the place of our dear lost Baby Bullet—a lovely little double-opposed horizontal that shall be its namesake, and keep alive its memory!"

"Oh, Christine, listen!" cried Essy. But, strange to say, Miss Schell showed no enthusiasm.

"Perhaps you'd prefer an electric," said Sutphen, mistaking the nature of her hesitation,

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"or one of those dandy White steamers with a compound engine and condenser?"

"Answer, my angel," said Alphonse.

His angel's lips quivered.

"Are we going to desert Baby Bullet?" she said. "Do you mean that we are to go away, and do nothing to get it back? That—that we'll never see Baby again?"

Here was an unexpected facer for Prince Bountiful.

"Of course I'm ready to do anything you want," he stammered. "I—I——"

"I don't believe any one of you cares what becomes of Baby!" exclaimed Miss Schell tearfully.

The stinging truth of this assertion made them all feel guilty.

"I was tremendously fond of Baby," protested Sutphen.

"Why, Christine, we all loved the little car," added Essy.

"The dear old Despardoux!" put in Alphonse. "It was Baby that brought us all togezzzer, and intertwined ze treads of our lifes!"

"You bet it was," said Sutphen heartily.

"But nobody says anything about getting

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Baby back!" Miss Schell's tone of reproach was crushing. "And I can't help thinking that nobody wants to!"

There rose a chorus of denial.

"Of course we're going to rescue Baby!" exclaimed Sutphen, "and then take it to America with us—only it—it—kind of slipped my mind, you know."

"Slipped his mind," explained Essy loyally.

"Who knows what those horrid soldiers mayn't have done to it?" went on Miss Schell, morbidly trying to work on their feelings. "Perhaps they'll try and keep it for themselves, and fight us!"

"If there's one good thing in this old country it is their law," said Sutphen. "If you have enough money you can get the best law in the world. Now listen to me, Miss Schell. I tell you I'm going to recover Baby if it costs me my last dollar!"

"And begin right away?" ejaculated Miss Schell.

"To-morrow," returned Sutphen. "Not a minute shall be lost, I promise you."

"And in the same steamer with us?"

"The bridal suite if you think Baby would prefer it!"

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"And it's not from any idea of humoring me, but because you love the little car for its own sake?"

"Devoted to it," said Sutphen.

Miss Schell regained something of her composure. Now that Sutphen was pledged to recover Baby Bullet she hinted delicately that she was free to accept the new car. Not, as she protested, that it could ever take the former's place in her affections—but as a mere convenience in "getting around." But all the same she recurred so constantly to her lost darling, and always with such an agitation and dread "that it might have been made away with," that it required a great deal of conversational nimbleness to keep her off this unfortunate topic. Her last words, as she said good night to her host, were to remind him of his promise.

"Oh, my poor little car!" she exclaimed. "Who knows where it is to-night, or what they're doing to it?"

"It's in a good, comfortable barn somewhere," said Essy reassuringly.

"I've an awful premonition they're towing it into the Highlands," quavered Miss Schell.

"Then we'll follow it," cried Sutphen, "and

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if need be we'll put a cordon of detectives round the entire country, and close in on them as Kitchener did on Cronje. Don't you be afraid, Miss Schell; we'll get Baby back if we have to run a fine tooth comb through the entire kingdom! "

Chuck-chuck-chuck-miss. Chuck-chuck-miss-chuck-chuck. Chuck-miss-miss-pppprrrrbbb — and the engine died as the little remaining gasoline slopped over to one side of the tank, and uncovered the feed-pipe! They were now on the outskirts of Peebles, with hardly more than a teacup of the precious fluid left. To leave the center of the road involved on each occasion the death of the engine; and even in the center, nursed like a sick child, it missed horribly, with gasps and splutters that showed the end was near. But so also was Peebles, and it became a heartrending race to get into port before the ship sank. They toiled through the suburbs, expecting every moment to be their last; staggered and cranked into the business portion of the city; saw at length the great stone post-office looming at the end of a street. A three per cent grade revived the fainting engine—a three per cent grade, and Alphonse

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behind, pushing. They would make it after all! Push, Alphonse, push! The cylinders were still working fitfully, and there were only fifty more yards to do. Forty yards! Thirty! It would be too cruel to fail now on their last teaspoon! Their pride, their honor—everything was at stake!

Sutphen, with a sudden exclamation, began to wave his hand toward a radiantly dressed young man, with white gloves and a silver-handled umbrella, who, on the broad steps of the post-office, was giving vent to the liveliest expressions of recognition and joy.

"Thank Heaven, there's Benjy!" he cried. "Oh, Essy, it's Benjy Bardeen—and all our troubles are over!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when, with a final convulsion, the engine coughed for the last time, and then died dead, ten feet short of the goal. Sutphen jumped out, and adding his strength to Alphonse, managed to push the car to the curb where Benjy was waiting to welcome them.

Sutphen shook hands with him, and then, playfully taking him by the ear, led him to the front of the car.

"Down on your knees!" he roared. "Down

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on your knees where this young lady can see you!"

"No, no—hold on—say, now—I'll explain it all——!"

Benjy, waving a beautifully gloved hand in the air, was willing to submit to anything were he only allowed to speak.

"Morty, say, I've got in on the Kilburn Street Railway—you've got to listen—taken an option on the whole business—the biggest snap in the London street railway market—and with electrification——!"

"Down on your knees!" roared Sutphen.

Benjy, still talking, laid his handkerchief on the cobblestones, and obediently plumped down before Essy. Our whole party, tired, dusty, and pale with hunger, watched him raise his hands in supplication.

"As I was saying," continued the suppliant in a vehement torrent, "I had to find ten thousand pounds in the twinkling of an eye, and that was how I closed out our joint account in the sudden way I did—though why you sent me two hundred pounds, and a lot of ladies' rings, and a letter of credit that didn't belong to you, has kept me awake nights! I couldn't square it with your telegram or that red-hot

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post-card. Well, I managed to scrape together the rest of the money, here and there, and landed right in—and yesterday, when the news got around to Brogan, he offered to come in at 110 on getting control, but I couldn't see it. Why, old man, it's the surest sixteen per cent proposition there ever was——”

“Abase yourself, caitiff, and ask the young lady to forgive you!”

“Why, yes, certainly—with the greatest pleasure—I know I've made an awful mess of it, and caused you no end of trouble. I'm quite prepared to grovel, if you'll push back the crowd a bit, and give me room!”

“No; get up, and be introduced.”

“Miss Lockhart,” said Sutphen, raising his smiling and bewildered friend, “this is Mr. Benjamin Bardeen, whom I hope you'll try and like. I used to like him myself once, before he burgled my tin bank. Miss Lockhart, Benjy, is the future Mrs. Mortimer Sutphen. Thanks to you, she hasn't had a bite since yesterday afternoon, and you had better make it up with her quick if you're likely to play much in our yard!”

Benjy's open countenance displayed extreme astonishment.

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" Say, I'm most awful sorry! " he exclaimed, warmly shaking Essy's outstretched hand. " Good heavens, I didn't know it had been as bad as that. Really, I ask you in all earnestness to forgive me—and let me congratulate you ever so heartily on your engagement. There isn't a finer man on earth than old Morty—but you quite take my breath away—he's been busy, too, hasn't he? Miss Schell, delighted to meet you! How do you do, sir? So the gasoline gave out, did it? "

" Everything gave out," interrupted Sutphen. " You don't know what we've been through. I tell you we're famishing! "

Benjy went through another orgy of self-denunciation. Then he wanted to know why they hadn't done this—hadn't done that? He was irritatingly resourceful in the retrospect. He was told to shut up, and not make an infernal ass of himself.

" Don't stand here talking! " exclaimed Sutphen. " Get us something to eat, quick. We know you'd have managed it a lot better, but, for the Lord's sake, steer us to a breakfast! "

Deserting Gee Whiz, Benjy guided them to his hotel, recurring constantly on the way to

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the Kilburn Street Railway—to Hobbs and Wilder, who were also coming in on the deal—to the amount of the bond issue—and mixing up congratulations, high finance, contrition, and what *he* would have done under the circumstances—all in one swift and continuous stream.

A meal was ordered in a private sitting-room, Sutphen comprehensively bidding the waiter to “bring them everything he had!” He was promised half a sovereign to exert himself, and flew out of the room as though fired from a cannon. The whole house could be heard running. Rolls, butter, radishes appeared at a run. Then tea and coffee on the gallop. Then files of waiters with dish-covers. Benjy Bardeen looked on aghast, in conscience-stricken surprise. No castaways, picked up on a raft, could have done better justice to what was provided. It was the breakfast of their lives! It was to live for years in their memory, and the tale of it would descend to their children, and their children’s children. Never was there such marmalade, such toast, such tea, such kippers, such broiled ham, such Heaven-sent eggs! Gourmets might talk of Paris—of Voisein’s and the Café Riche—but to Essy

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and Sutphen it was ever the Waverly Hotel, Peebles!

Facing Miss Schell was a window that looked out on the street below. Suddenly she rose in her place with a cry of wonder and delight, dropping the piece of buttered toast she held in her hand. What was she pointing at so wildly? Her companions turned and followed the direction of her eyes. The how, why, or wherefore of that extraordinary apparition would take another book to explain. Perhaps, if encouraged, the writer at some future day will bend himself to the task. But in the meanwhile it is enough to tell the present reader that there below, with a burly policeman on the seat, and another walking beside two immense dray-horses, was Baby Bullet, trundling drearily toward them! Downcast and woebegone, dusty, tire-sore, and creaking with weariness, it was limping into Peebles to search for those it loved.

Toot! toot!

Q

THE END

WHERE LOVE CONQUERS.

The Reckoning.

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

The author's intention is to treat, in a series of four or five romances, that part of the war for independence which particularly affected the great landed families of northern New York, the Johnsons, represented by Sir William, Sir John, Guy Johnson, and Colonel Claus; the notorious Butlers, father and son, the Schuylers, Van Rensselaers, and others.

The first romance of the series, *Cardigan*, was followed by the second, *The Maid-at-Arms*. The third, in order, is not completed. The fourth is the present volume.

As *Cardigan* pretended to portray life on the baronial estate of Sir William Johnson, the first uneasiness concerning the coming trouble, the first discordant note struck in the harmonious councils of the Long House, so, in *The Maid-at-Arms*, which followed in order, the author attempted to paint a patroon family disturbed by the approaching rumble of battle. That romance dealt with the first serious split in the Iroquois Confederacy; it showed the Long House shattered though not fallen; the demoralization and final flight of the great landed families who remained loyal to the British Crown; and it struck the key-note to the future attitude of the Iroquois toward the patriots of the frontier—revenge for their losses at the battle of Oriskany—and ended with the march of the militia and continental troops on Saratoga.

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The author is not conscious of having taken any liberties with history in preparing a framework of facts for a mantle of romance.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

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WORKS OF ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

IOLE

Colored inlay on the cover, decorative borders, head-pieces, thumb-nail sketches, and tail-pieces. Frontispiece and three full-page illustrations. 12mo. Ornamental Cloth, \$1.25.

Does anybody remember the opera of *The Inca*, and that heart-breaking episode where the Court Undertaker, in a morbid desire to increase his professional skill, deliberately accomplishes the destruction of his middle-aged relatives in order to inter them for the sake of practice?

If I recollect, his dismal confession runs something like this :

"It was in bleak November
When I slew them, I remember,
As I caught them unawares
Drinking tea in rocking-chairs."

And so he talked them to death, the subject being "What Really Is Art?"
Afterward he was sorry—

"The squeak of a door,
The creak of a floor,
My horrors and fears enhance;
And I wake with a scream
As I hear in my dream
The shrieks of my maiden aunts!"

Now it is a very dreadful thing to suggest that those highly respectable pseudo-spinsters, the Sister Arts, supposedly cozily immune in their polygamous chastity (for every suitor for favor is popularly expected to be wedded to his particular art)—I repeat, it is very dreadful to suggest that these impeccable old ladies are in danger of being talked to death.

But the talkers are talking and Art Nouveau rockers are rocking, and the trousers of the prophet are patched with stained glass, and it is a day of dinkiness and of thumbs.

Let us find comfort in the ancient proverb: "Art talked to death shall rise again." Let us also recollect that "Dinky is as dinky does;" that "All is not Shaw that Bernards;" that "Better Yeates than Clever;" that words are so inexpensive that there is no moral crime in robbing Henry to pay James.

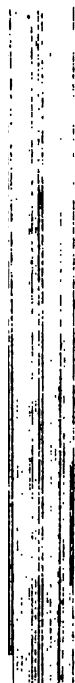
Firmly believing all this, abjuring all atom-pickers, slab furniture, and woodchuck literature—save only the immortal verse:

"And there the wooden-chuck doth tread;
While from the oak trees' tops
The red, red squirrel on the head
The frequent acorn drops."

Abjuring, as I say, dinkiness in all its forms, we may still hope that those cleanly and respectable spinsters, the Sister Arts, will continue throughout the ages, rocking and drinking tea unterrified by the million-tongued clamor in the back yard and below stairs, where thumb and forefinger continue the question demanded by intellectual exhaustion:

"L'arr! Kesker say l'arr?"

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